Tomasz Stępień /
Karolina Kochańczyk-Bonińska

Unknown God, Known in His Activities

Incomprehensibility of God during the Trinitarian Controversy of the 4th Century

European Studies in Theology, Philosophy and History of Religions

Edited by Bartosz Adamczewski

PETER LANG

What can man know about God? This question became one of the main problems during the 4th-century Trinitarian controversy, which is the focus of this book. Especially during the second phase of the conflict, the claims of Anomean Eunomius caused an emphatic response of Orthodox writers, mainly Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa. Eunomius formulated two ways of theology to show that we can know both the substance (ousia) and activities (energeiai) of God. The Orthodox Fathers demonstrated that we can know only the external activities of God, while the essence is entirely incomprehensible. Therefore the 4th-century discussion on whether the Father and the Son are of the same substance was the turning point in the development of negative theology and shaping the Christian conception of God.

Tomasz Stępień is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Theology, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw. He researches and publishes on Ancient Philosophy, Early Christian Philosophy, Natural Theology and Philosophy of Religion.

Karolina Kochańczyk-Bonińska is Assistant Professor at the Institute of the Humanities and Social Sciences, War Studies University in Warsaw. She researches and publishes on Early Christian Philosophy and translates patristic texts.

www.peterlang.com

Unknown God, Known in His Activities

EUROPEAN STUDIES IN THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY AND HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

Edited by Bartosz Adamczewski

VOL. 18

PETER LANG

Tomasz Stępień & Karolina Kochańczyk-Bonińska

Unknown God, Known in His Activities

Incomprehensibility of God during the Trinitarian Controversy of the 4th Century

PETER LANG

Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de.

The authors acknowledge financial support from the National Science Centre, Poland, grant number 2013/11/B/HS1/04140.

Copyedited by Elżbieta Puławska and Anna Kazimierczak-Kucharska

Tomasz Stępień: 1, 2, 3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6, 5.2
Karolina Kochańczyk-Bonińska: 4.5, 5.1, 5.3, 5.4

ISSN 2192-1857
ISBN 978-3-631-75736-9 (Print)
ISBN 978-3-631-75737-6 (E-PDF)
ISBN 978-3-631-75738-3 (EPUB)
ISBN 978-3-631-75739-0 (MOBI)
DOI 10.3726/ b14190

Peter Lang – Berlin · Bern · Bruxelles · New York · Oxford · Warszawa · Wien

This publication has been peer reviewed.

www.peterlang.com

Preface

Looking at the philosophical and theological traditions, one can see that man has been constantly trying to describe the Absolute. Those attempts have always been confronted with the problem of how to speak about the reality which is somehow known to man, but also remains beyond the reach of human intellect. That is why negative theology seems indispensable in such attempts to describe the one who remains mysterious despite all efforts to describe him. Negative speaking on God exposes many fundamental problems of epistemological and linguistic nature. It urges one to reconsider the limits of human knowledge, the capability of the human language to express the reality, since man has to use words to express the Unsayable.

The tradition of negative theology is so prolific because it is not only a theoretical issue of naming the First Principle, but it is intrinsically linked with the human experience of the Absolute. Negative theology is then almost a fundament of the mystical tradition, and it seems that God that unveils Himself when He is experienced is most often described in negative terms.

But negative theology is not an outdated view of the past ideas. It seems that it is still alive and present in the currents of modern thought. When presenting the complicated situation of contemporary philosophy of religion, J.A. Simmons points out that this field of study is in the state of crisis and seeking the new directions.[1] Negative theology is recognized as one of the basic problems which must be confronted in the study of philosophy of religion, and therefore the study of traditions of this way of speaking on God is also given as the proposition of a new direction and exploration of new frontiers.[2]

In this study, we shall examine the negative theology of a period which was of utmost importance for shaping the Christian doctrine – the 4th century. It was the time of looking for new concepts and possibilities of expressing Christian dogmas, and negative theology was certainly one of them. The most important debate of that period, started by Arius,

1 *Cf.* J.A. Simmons, *Old Questions and New Frontiers in Philosophy of Religion*, in: *Contemporary Debates in Negative Theology and Philosophy*, ed. N. Brown, J.A. Simmons, Palgrave Macmillan 2017, pp. 1–4.

2 *Cf. ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

concerned the problem of the status of the Son of God: whether He was equal to the Father or rather an inferior and first created being. It seems that negative theology also played an important role at the early stage of the controversy. There were writers who used negative and positive theology to support their positions. It will be seen during the course of this study that positive or negative claims of God on the one side of the conflict almost always caused the opposite claims on the other side. However, to understand the role of negative theology in this discussion, it is necessary to show briefly the development of negative theology starting from the most obvious point of reference for Christian writers, namely the Holy Scripture. Although the Bible is ambiguous on this topic, we observe the constant growth of the importance of negative speaking on God in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Nonetheless, the 4th century seems crucial to the understanding how negative theology settled for good in the Christian thought.

There is certainly an important role of negative argumentation on inferiority of the Son of God in Arius himself, which will be investigated together with the Orthodox response. But there was a significant shift of the debate when the Anomeans (Aetius and Eunomius) started to spread their opinion that the essence of God can be known. Especially Eunomius was the one who skilfully argued on this claim and provoked the response of Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa. There is no need here to describe the complete timeline of this phase of the discussion since we have many studies which explain well the sequence of writings,[3] but for the purpose of this study, it seems necessary to recall the basic facts.

The timeline of the discussion between Eunomius, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa

Most of all, it is worth remembering that Eunomius and his teacher Aetius were not Arians in the strict sense. In their own lifetime, they were recognized as a separate group which was most radical since they claimed that the Son has the substance which is different and dissimilar with that of

3 The most important of them is certainly: T. A. Kopecek, A *History of Neo-Arianism*, Cambridge 1979, pp. 299–543. *Cf.* also: M. DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names*, Leiden, Boston 2010, pp. 3–14.

the Father. Therefore, they are rather Neo-Arians, and in their own times, they were also called Anomeans (from ἀνόμοιος - dissimilar).

The first Anomean writing was *Syntagmation* by Aetius, but that text had a formal structure and was complicated; therefore, it was not popular and did not play any important role during the conflict.[4] Eunomius was a disciple and secretary of Aetius since the late 340s.[5] There is still a debate among scholars as to when the first work of Eunomius: *Liber Apologeticus* was created. We can assume that the most accurate date – 359 – was proposed by Thomas Kopecek, who also claimed that it was presented at the Council of Constantinople.[6] However, both Basil and Gregory objected that *Apology* was never presented, but rather written, and Eunomius only claimed that he had presented it because he wanted to convince the readers that he provided answers to Orthodox arguments.[7]

Basil of Caesarea wrote his *Contra Eunomium* because the heteroousian doctrine significantly spread out after the success of the Council in 359. There is also a disagreement among scholars as regards the date of its creation. Having reconsidered various opinions, Mark DelCogliano claims that it was written after the accusation of Valens, and, therefore, the most probable date is 364 or 365.[8] However, T. Kopecek points out that after the Council in 359, the next Council in Constantinople accepted the

4 *Cf.* L. R. Wickham, *The Syntagmation of Aetius*, JTS 19 (1968), pp. 533–537.

5 *Cf.* M. DelCogliano, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

6 F. Diekamp was the first who tried to establish the date on which *Apology* was written. He claimed that it was presented at the end of 360, when Eunomius was recalled by the gathering in Constantinople (F. Diekamp, *Literargeschichtliches zu der Eunomianischen Kontroverse*, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 18 (1909), pp. 1–13). T. Kopecek claimed that *Apology* was presented at the synod at Constantinople at 359, where Eunomius was as a deacon with his teacher Aetius (T.A. Kopecek, *op. cit.*, pp. 299–306). In his edition of extant works of Eunomius R. P. Vaggione claims that Apology was written in 360–361, because it must have been created before Basil's response in *Contra Eunomium* in 364 (R.P. Vaggione, *Introduction*, in: Eunomius, *The Extant Works*, New York 2002, p. IX). R. Willing also agrees on this date (R. Winling, *Introduction*, in: Grégoire de Nysse, *Contre Eunome*, SC 521, p. 28).

7 Basil, *Con. Eun.*, I, 2 (SC 299, pp. 149–157); Gregory of Nyssa, CE I, 61–66 (GNO I, 43–45).

8 *Cf.* M. DelCogliano, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

homoiousian symbol of 359 and deposed all homoousian bishops, including Basil's mentor Eustachius of Sebasta, from offices. Those events probably induced Basil to write *Contra Eunomium*, so taking into account the internal and external testimonies, T. Kopecek sets its date as 360 or 361.[9]

The response of Eunomius was written after he had been expelled to the island of Naos in 370, where he started to work on his *Apologia apologiae*. Two books of the work were ready in the year of the death of Emperor Valens in 378.[10] T. Kopecek suggests that Eunomius took advantage of the interregnum to attack his opponent.[11] We are not sure whether this work contained two or even as many as five books,[12] but we have only fragments of the first three books, thanks to the quotations made by Gregory in his *Contra Eunomium*.

At the end of 379, Anomeans began the missionary activity in the diocese of Gregory in Nyssa, and after he returned from the Council of Antioch in the autumn of 379, he encountered the successive spreading of their doctrine. Therefore, when Gregory gained access to the text of two books of *Apologia Apologiae*, he started to write the response as Basil died in 379. The answer to the first book was published at the end of 380.[13] The situation also alarmed Gregory of Nazianz, and, therefore, he presented his Theological Sermons between 14 of July and 24 of November 380.[14] The second book of Gregory's *Contra Eunomium* was finished before May of 381, because we know that he presented two completed books of his work to Gregory of Nazianz and Hieronymus.[15] In 381, Eunomius probably published the third book of *Apologia Apologiae*, and Gregory answered before 383.[16]

9 *Cf.* T. A. Kopecek, *op. cit.*, pp. 362–372.
10 *Cf.* F. Diekamp, *op. cit.*, pp. 9–10.
11 *Cf.* T. A. Kopecek, *op. cit.*, p. 441.
12 *Cf. ibid.*, p. 442.
13 *Cf.* F. Diekamp, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
14 *Cf.* T.A. Kopecek, *op. cit.*, p. 496.
15 *Cf.* Hieronymus, *De viris illustribus* 128 (PL 23, 753 A).
16 M. Cassin, *Contre Eunome III: Introduction*, in: *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium III. An English Translation with Commentary and Supporting Studies*, Leiden, Boston 2014, pp. 4–5.

The situation changed in 381, and after Theodosius's edicts against Eunomians in 383/394, the entire movement was outlawed.[17] But Anomeans were still strong, especially in Antioch, where their rise began, and, therefore, in 386, John Chrysostom presented five speeches against their doctrines.[18] After Eunomius' death in 394, it slowly began to lose its cohesiveness, and vanished, not only because of the death of its main figure, but also thanks to Emperor Theodosius, who was committed to strengthening Nicene Orthodoxy.[19]

The status of research on negative theology and the problem of ἐνέργεια in the 4th century

Although since the late 1970s, scholars have recognized the importance of Eunomius, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa to the understanding of the 4th century theological debate,[20] there was very little interest in the influence of the discussion on rapid development of Christian negative theology. The figure of Gregory of Nyssa was recognized as especially important, but there was but little recognition that his negative theology was shaped as the response to Eunomius. In her important book on negative theology in the Platonic tradition, Deidre Carabine only briefly states that the negative theology of Gregory of Nyssa "cannot be divorced from complex theological background of the 4th century,"[21] but she only mentions the Arian conflict without any specification of the negative theology of Arius. Eunomius is also only mentioned and the author does not speak about the importance of the concept of God's activity as the way to the knowledge of his substance.

Probably, the most extensive study on the topic was done by Raul Mortley, who in the second volume of his work *From Word to Silence* extensively discusses the use of the negative theology of Eunomius, Basil and Gregory of

17 *Cf.* T.A. Kopecek, *op. cit.*, p. 519.
18 *Cf. ibid.*, p. 529.
19 *Cf. ibid.*, pp. 542–543. Two sons of Theodosius: Arcadius and Honorius also continued their father's attitude towards Eunomians.
20 *Cf.* M. DelCogliano, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
21 D. Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eriugena*, Eugene 1995, p. 234.

Nyssa.[22] However, he concentrates his analysis of Eunomius on the logical problems of the language and shows that the Neo-Arian was in fact an active participant of the contemporary philosophical discussion on the meaning of negation, and in some cases, he was even a precursor of the late Neoplatonic discussion on positive and privative negation.[23] Although those problems are certainly present in *Liber apologeticus*, I would argue that they do not play the most important role in Eunomius' theology. Besides, it does not seem plausible to call somebody who claims that we can comprehend God's essence a negative theologian. An analysis of the structure of Eunomius' work will show that the concept of the activity of God, which is generation of the Son, is far more important for him. If we look at negative theology from Gregory of Nyssa's point of view, we also see that the problem of ἐνέργεια has a more profound meaning for negative theology, since the claims made by Eunomius brought about his elaborate answer as to impossibility of knowing the substance of God by means of His activities.[24]

Therefore, the problem of understanding ἐνέργεια and its relation to οὐσία is extensively discussed in the fourth chapter of this book. Fortunately, this topic has been lately a point of interest of scholars, and we have two important studies published by David Bradshaw[25] and

22 It is also worth mentioning his very important article on the role of negative theology in Arius: R. Morley, *Alien God in Arius*, *in: Platonism in the Late Antiquity*, ed. S. Gersh, Ch. Kannengeisser, Notre Dame 1992, pp. 205–215.

23 R. Mortley even states that: "…probably the best way to understand Eunomius would be to write a philological commentary on him, treating all his vocabulary as if it came from Proclus, Syrianus and Dexippus." (R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, *Christian and Greek*, Bonn 1986, p. 147).

24 R. Mortley's thesis on the negative theology of Basil the Great is rather controversial since he concludes that: "Basil's negative theology is little more than an enhanced sense of the transcendent, or a form of piety." and he call it "the negative theology of the amateur" (*op. cit.*, p. 170). He has a higher opinion on the the negative theology of Gregory of Nyssa (*op. cit.*, p. 171), but he also states that: "There is no science of negation in Gregory" (*op. cit.*, p. 191).

25 D. Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West. Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom*, Cambridge 2004. The publishing of this book provoked a wide discussion on the problem of Divine activities, especially in Orthodox circles, since the doctrine of energies is the core of Orthodox theology, *cf.* C. Schneider, *Beyond Agnostisism and Pantheism*, in: *Divine Essence and Divine Energies*, ed. C. Athanasopoulos, C. Schneider, Cambridge 2013, pp. 9–13.

Jean-Claude Larchet.[26] The study of D. Bradshaw shows well the philosophical background and development of ἐνέργεια, but he only briefly mentions the importance of the claims of Eunomius, and, therefore, he seems to underestimate Gregory's response.[27] The book by Jean-Claude Larchet, on the other hand, more widely discusses Christian sources and the obvious fact that for the Church Fathers, the problem of ἐνέργεια was the exegesis of the Holy Scripture rather than exploration of philosophical sources.[28] Hence, although both studies seem to give a complete view of the topic, none of them recognizes Eunomius' dual theology. Thus, we found it important to present more broadly both sources of the tradition in the first part of the fourth chapter of this study to provide a background for the understanding of Eunomius's methods. The most important figure of the discussion of ἐνέργεια is of course Aristotle since he invented the term and used it for the first time to describe the activity of God. Although D. Bradshaw's study is very profound in presenting Aristotle's ideas, it is also worth mentioning a very important book by Johnathan Beere in which he proposes a new interpretation of ἐνέργεια in *Metaphysics*.[29]

Terminological remarks

Before we go any further, we must make some remarks on the terminology the reader will encounter throughout this study. Especially, in the case of ἐνέργεια, we face the problem of a proper translation which would render the full signification of the term. Johnathan Beere points out that there is no English term or phrase that describes the meaning of ἐνέργεια. In the case of Aristotle, there are two traditional translations of this term: "actuality" and "activity."[30] The problem was also recognized by the scholars who studied

26 J.-C. Larchet, *La théologie des énergies divines. Des origines à saint Jean Damascène*, Paris 2010.

27 *Cf.* D. Bradshaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 156–161.

28 I find the chapter discussing the usage of ἐνέργεια in the Septuagint and New Testament especially important (*op. cit.*, pp. 83–93).

29 J. Beere, *Doing and Being. An Interpretation of Aristotle's "Metaphysics Theta"*, Oxford 2009.

30 *Cf.* J. Beere, *op. cit.*, p. 159. D. Bradshaw also makes a similar remark, *cf.* *Aristotle East and West*, *op. cit.*, pp. 14–15.

the works of Eunomius and the Cappadocians. It is sometimes rendered in a Latin transliteration as "energy" or in translations as "action" or "activity." But it seems that currently in the studies concerning the thought of Aristotle and Christian writers, the term "activity" has been recognized as the most proper; however, it does not convey the full depth of the Greek original.[31] Nevertheless, in our study, apart from Greek ἐνέργεια, "activity" will be consistently used.

Another terminological remark concerns a more general problem of understanding and naming negative theology. Many scholars use the term ἀπόφασις describing the negative theology of early Christian authors such as Clement of Alexandria or Gregory of Nyssa.[32] The case of the latter is significant since for Gregory of Nyssa, the term ἀπόφασις has mainly a positive meaning and refers to something "clear," "determined."[33] This is in accord with what D. Carabine claims in her book on negative theology. She points out that until Proclus and development of the negative language in the 5th century, we cannot properly speak about *apophatic* theology. Earlier occurrences of the negative language could be seen as a simple negation or privation (στέρησις, ἀφαίρεσις). In the writings of Proclus, especially in the rigorous analysis of the First Hypothesis of Parmenides, he established ἀπόφασις as the method of negative theology.[34] Therefore,

---

31 In his translation of the extant works of Eunomius, R. P. Vaggione uses the term "action" (e.g. LA 20, 8, in: Eunomius, *The Extant Works*, p. 58). In their translation of Basil's *Contra Eunomium* Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallvitz propose to use "activity" (St. Basil of Cesarea, *Against Eunomius*, Washington 2011, p. 77). When commenting on the translation of ἐνέργεια in the works of Gregory of Nyssa, Giulio Maspero says: "Following Daniélou, it would seem that the best choice for translating ἐνέργεια is 'activity' rather than 'energy'." (G. Maspero, *Trinity and Man. Gregory of Nyssa "Ad Ablabium"*, Leiden, Boston, 2007, p. 39).

32 In the case of Clement, it can be seen in the very title of Fiskå Hägg's book: *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism*, Oxford 2014. In the case of Gregory, the use of the term is very common *cf.* e.g. M. Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa, Ancient and (Post)modern*, Oxford 2007, p. 232; M. Larid, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith. Union, Knowledge, and Divine Presence*, Oxford 2004, pp. 180; 198; 211 *etc.*

33 *Cf.* G. Maspero, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

34 *Cf.* D. Carabine, *op. cit.*, pp. 184–185.

although the use of the term "apophatic theology" is common, one must be alert and does not attribute apophatic theology in its fully grown version to those early authors.

The problem of philosophical sources

The last introductory problem concerning the figure of Eunomius and his opponents as well as all Christian writers is the extent to which they used Greek philosophy. This issue almost always provokes a debate between scholars concerning many Early Christian figures, but as regards the 4th century, it seems to be particularly complicated. As we will see, from both sides of the Arian debate, there were constant accusations of being a philosopher, logical chopper, technologos, etc. Both the Arians and the Orthodox certainly referred to a Greek legacy. A good example is the doctrine of Eunomius, who is the central figure in our investigation. Eunomius has been commonly perceived by scholars as a Neoplatonist.[35] During our discussion, we will see that this position may be challenged because of fundamental disagreements and rejection of the Neoplatonic doctrine which we find in Eunomius and this is best seen in the crucial problem of the activity of God. He strongly opposed the view that any activity of God could be identified with the substance. The claim that was made already by Aristotle, but in the strongest manner confirmed by Plotinus in his theory of two activities. But this does not mean that he rejected philosophical teaching as such. He, for example, quotes and accepts the definition of time from *Timaeus*[36] because it well serves his purpose at this stage of demonstration, but some chapters later reject the notion of a receptacle as pagan and foolish.[37] This is of course only an example, but if we try to estimate Eunomius' attitude

35 The most significant opinion on the matter was presented by R. Mortley, who stated: "Eunomius' philosophy has its roots in the Greek philosophy of the period: it makes for more use of Neoplatonic logic than does Patristic philosophy in general." (R. Mortley, *op.cit.*, p. 138). Similar although less strong claims were made by: J. Danielou, *Eunome l'Arien et l' exégèse néo-platonicienne du Cratyle*, in: *Revue des études grecques*, 69, 1956, p. 428; B. Sesbuë, *Introduction to l'Apologie d'Eunome*, SC 305, pp. 191–195; A. Meredith, *Studies in the Contra Eunomium of Gregory or Nyssa*, Oxford 1972, pp. 62–72.

36 *Cf.* LA 10, 5–6 (Vaggione pp. 44–45).

37 *Cf.* LA 16, 4–6 (Vaggione, pp. 52–53).

towards Greek Philosophy on the basis of his texts, we must conclude that he felt free to use some of the doctrines while rejecting others.

Therefore, this is not the problem of which philosophical writings he knew, but rather how he used those which he had read and what was his purpose in any given passage. It seems that we may make similar claims with respect to other Christian writers who also freely used philosophy when it helped them to understand and explain the faith. Therefore, we entirely agree with Johannes Zachhuber's conclusion concerning the use of philosophical texts by Gregory of Nyssa. The main problem with Gregory is that he did not collect the excerpts of philosophical writings like Clemens and Eusebius, while at the same time, he was one of "the more philosophically minded Church Fathers."[38] Thus, his writings are certainly full of echoes and references to philosophical sources which were incorporated in his system. But in the case of Gregory, as well as many other figures of the 4th century, we have very little data as to their philosophical education, and we remain uncertain whether he could have known certain works. As J. Zachhuber rightly notes: "uncertain does not mean non-existent."[39] Therefore, if the writers we examine themselves freely used philosophical sources, any trace of resemblances suggests that they could have read a given philosophical work. Therefore, J. Zachhuber seems to be right in his claim that working on Gregory he will: "freely adduce parallels from late ancient philosophers without committing [himself] to the assumption that Gregory must have read any particular book."[40] Such a methodological assumption seems profitable, since it allows to concentrate on the thought of the discussed author, while recalling philosophical sources where they are necessary to understand the presented doctrine.[41]

---

38 J. Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*, Leiden, Boston 2014, p. 9.
39 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
40 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
41 It must be noted that some of the works of philosophers were more available and more common. Among those were surely those which were also widely used in philosophical schools of the period. The list of such works used in curricula was presented by A.C. Lloyd, *cf.*, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism*, Oxford 1990, pp. 4–6.

Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge financial support from the National Science Centre, Poland, grant number 2013/11/B/HS1/04140.

Contents

Abbreviations

AGPh	Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
CAG	Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca
DOP	Dumbarton Oaks Papers
FCH	The Fathers of the Church (Series)
GCS	Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller
GCS NF	Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller Neue Folge
GNO	Gregorii Nyseni Opera
GOThR	Greek Orthodox Theological Review
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
PTS	Patristische Texten Und Studien
RSV	Revised Standard Version (Holy Scripture)
RSVCE	Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (Holy Scripture)
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
SP	Studia Patristica
VCh	Vigiliae Christianae
VP	Vox Patrum

1. The origins of Christian Negative Theology

1.1 The ambiguity of the Holy Scripture concerning the knowledge of God

God reveals Himself in the Old Testament, tells Abraham and Moses who He is, and what He demands. God also gives His law and orders how He should be worshiped. In other words, God makes Himself known to man, while His nature remains hidden. It is often revealed in symbols: He is present in the burning bush, in the cloud, and the pillar of fire, but those are merely symbols which reveal His power and glory, while at the same time, they somehow hide the mysterious essence of God. This fact was recognized and widely commented on by the Church Fathers. They paid special attention to the figure of Moses, who was closest to seeing God's nature since "the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." (Ex 33: 11). However, in other passages, the Book of Exodus clearly states that he was unable to see the face of God. During the two encounters with God on Mount Sinai, he sees only the cloud (24: 15–18), and to the demand of Moses, God answers that "you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live." (Ex 33–20) Therefore, hidden in a cleft of rock, he sees only the back of God who passes by (Ex 33: 17–23). As we will see, those verses played a very important role in the evolution of Christian mysticism and they were used especially by Gregory of Nyssa to show incomprehensibility of God. For the Church Fathers, however, the knowledge of God is never a theoretical issue. Knowing God rather means being closer to him and ascending the mystical path. Man cannot worship God of whom he knows nothing. So the first step always belongs to God, who reveals Himself to man. It is very significant that in the Old Testament all the greatest revelations took place before great journeys. In the case of Abraham, it was going out of the Chaldean city of Ur (Gen 12: 1–4). In the case of Israel, it was going out of Egypt. Abraham heard the voice of God, and Moses saw the burning bush and heard the voice. A revelation of God always provokes one to leave the place and go forward. Along the road, man gets closer to God and step by step his knowledge of God goes deeper.

But the road never ends in seeing God face to face. He reveals Himself, invites to know Him better, but still remains unknown.

One of the strongest negative statements of the Old Testament is linked with the struggle for monotheism. God has a transcendent nature and, therefore, there is a strong prohibition of making any image of Him.[42] The God of Israel is so different from pagan idols that there could be no likeness between Him and those idols. Therefore, any representation of God could be misleading and give a false image of His nature. God stays beyond any human imagination and thought, and his ways and thoughts are far remote from man. (Is 55: 8–9.) There is no one like God in His Holiness.[43] On the one hand, God reveals Himself, but on the other, He stays beyond any likeness to any other concept of God which can appear in human imagination. Therefore, the Old Testament leaves the question of knowing God open. On the one hand, Israel was aware of God's presence and care, but on the other, closeness to God was reserved for some figures, and even they were unable to see Him face to face. God, then, despite all what He revealed, will remain the "hidden God," who hides His face to man.[44]

The New Testament brings almost the same ambiguity of knowing and the lack of knowledge of God. However, this dialectic approach is expressed in a new manner. The incarnation of Christ is the only source of true knowledge of God. Since "no one has ever seen God," any cognition is possible by "the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made him known." (J 1: 18)[45] The revelation brought by the Incarnated is limited, and the nature of God will always be hidden since He "dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see" (1 Tim 6: 16). So the human nature of Christ reveals and also in some aspect hides the nature of God, and the true vision of God which is non-symbolic and direct is reserved to the afterlife. St Paul points it out very clearly in a passage of 1 Corinthians: "For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face

42 Ex 4: 6, 20: 23; Deut 4: 15, 5: 8–10, and Lev 26:1. See also, D. Carabine's comment on the topic, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

43 I Sam 2: 2; Hos 11: 9 and Ex 15: 11.

44 For all references of "hidden God" and its meaning in the Old Testament, *cf.* S.E. Balentine, *The Hidden God*, Oxford 1993, pp. 49–79.

45 On the impossibility of seeing the Father, see also J 6: 46; 1 J 4: 12.

to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known." (1 Cor 13: 12). All human desires and longings to know God will be achievable in the afterlife, and it is the essence of the reward for the faithful.

St Paul also writes about God's knowledge of the Greeks. The fragment of the Letter to Romans is so important that it needs a more in-depth analysis, since, as we will see, it will reappear in the discussion on the activities of God. The Greeks achieved the knowledge of God which is sufficient to admit that He should be worshiped. Since they did not do that, this knowledge is the reason of accusation. God manifested Himself to the Greeks (ὁ θεὸς γὰρ αὐτοῖς ἐφανέρωσεν), but this was not the kind of revelation which was granted to Israel; it was not a voice that was heard or a symbol that was seen, but rather God showed Himself in His creation.

> "For the invisible things (ἀόρατα) of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen (ποιήμασιν νοούμενα), being perceived through the things that are made (ποιήμασιν)." (Rom 1: 20)

This passage was always interpreted as admittance that man is able to have the knowledge of God thanks to natural reasons. The works of God are an explicit testimony of his divinity (θειότης) and his everlasting power (ἀΐδιος αὐτοῦ δύναμις). So the only things to be known are God's attributes, which can give some insight of who He is, but they do not show his essence. As we shall see, this point will become very important for Clement of Alexandria and later for the 4th-century discussion on the knowledge of God, because St Paul himself admits that the knowledge of God is the knowledge of what comes from him and not of his nature.

A second important topic of this passage, which will be present in the Arian controversy, is the relation of the knowledge of God to the ability to worship Him. The Greeks possessed enough knowledge to praise the glory of God, and St Paul accused them of not doing so; moreover, they kept that knowledge to themselves (Rom 1: 18). They deserved the wrath of God because "knowing God (γνότες τὸν θεὸν), they glorified him not as God, neither gave thanks…" (1: 21). For the Apostle, the relation between the knowledge of and worshiping God goes both ways. The knowledge of God should lead to worship, but a lack of such worship also has disastrous consequences for further knowledge. That is why their reasoning became

vain and their hearts were darkened.[46] Since their knowledge did not make them worship true God, instead of being wise they became foolish, because they continued to worship idols. In the eyes of St Paul, this simply meant that they "exchanged the truth of God for a lie." (Rom 1: 25) This passage, thus, clearly shows that for the Apostle the link between knowledge and worship is fundamental and the two are never separated, which will be seen in the discussion on the troublesome Anomean question of whether "You worship what you know, or what you do not know." Therefore, Neo-Arian accusations of the Orthodox were of much greater importance than we would admit from the present perspective, and the participants in the polemic certainly could refer their discussion to the Bible, which shows the topic in such light.

The question of the possibility of knowing God can be seen as the question of the limits of knowledge. God can be known to some extent, and such knowledge is indispensable for worshiping and reaching God. On the other hand, it is also evident that man with his limited powers of intellect cannot know God as much as he wants to. The texts of the Old and New Testament leave the question open. Christian writers, who search the Bible for answers to the question whether the knowledge of God is possible, may have found answers confirming both positions. The Holy Scripture contains the knowledge of God, who reveals Himself while at the same time provides very strong evidence of his incomprehensibility.

1.2 Philo of Alexandria – transcendence and negative theology

The writings of Philo of Alexandria are among the earliest examples of using negative theology as the primary way of speaking of God. Although his doctrine was based on the Pentateuch in the Septuagint version commented in the spirit of Platonic philosophy, his influence was not significant for the Jewish or pagan tradition. His writings, however, were crucial to Christian theology, and his influence is especially seen in the development

46 Rom 1: 21. ἀλλ᾽ ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐσκοτίσθη ἡ ἀσύνετος αὐτῶν καρδία·.

of the Alexandrian patristic tradition.[47] Moreover, there is a resemblance between Philo's account of creation of the universe and early Arian claims on the created character of the Logos,[48] and we also must remember that Gregory of Nyssa himself found a quotation from Philo in *Second Apology* by Eunomius.[49]

The fundamental statement of Philo's philosophy is the identification of the Platonic One with the God of the Old Testament.[50] Here, for the first time in Ancient tradition, we observe speaking about the God of the Scripture in the language of philosophy. The God of the Scripture is the Creator of the Universe, and the act of creation of this kind was unknown to Greek philosophy, which saw the Universe as eternal. For Philo, the Creator is completely different and separated from the creations, and to emphasize his entirely different nature, he presents God as the only Uncreated (ἀγένητος) being. This distinction underlies the criticism of idolatry, because being creations, the Sun and the stars could no longer be treated as having the divine power and causing the events on Earth.[51] God is also naturally the sole agent, and in relation to Him, the creations are always passive and receptive.[52] God is then unlike any idols and, therefore, cannot

47 The treatises of Philo were preserved thanks to Christians not Jews. (A. Louth, *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition from Plato to Denys*, Oxford 2007, p. 17). The fact that his doctrine was not acknowledged in the Jewish theology shows that Philo was probably a representative of a minority of the Alexandrian Jewish community (D. Carabine, *op. cit.*, p. 195).

48 *Cf.* H. A. Wolfson, *Philosophical Implications of Arianism and Apollinarianism*, DOP, vol. 12 (1958), p. 11.

49 *Cf.* CE III, 5, 24 (GNO II, 168, 11–18).

50 Eric Osborn notes that Philo's understanding of God resembles monism of Eudorus of Alexandria, who understood the One as the basis for all beings, and because it is the only principle of all it is beyond any properties (E. Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, Cambridge 2005, p. 114).

51 *Spec.* I, 13, 1–3. "Some have supposed that the sun and moon and the other stars were gods with absolute powers and ascribed to them the causation of all events" (Colson/Whitaker, vol. 7, pp. 106–107).

52 *Cher.* 77 "What deadlier foe to the soul can there be than he who in his vainglory claims to himself that which belongs to God alone? For it belongs to God to act (ἴδιον μὲν δὴ θεοῦ τὸ ποιεῖν), and this we may not ascribe to any created being. What belongs to the created is to suffer (ἴδιον δὲ γενητοῦ τὸ πάσχειν)" (Colson/Whitaker, vol. 2, pp. 54–55).

be cognized like gods made by humans. So, naturally, the only Uncreated must be incomprehensible: "The Unoriginated [ἀγένητος] resembles nothing among created [γένεσις] things, but so completely transcends them that even the swiftest understanding falls far short of apprehending Him and acknowledges its failure."[53] The God of the Scripture is, then, not only unlike anything in the sensible world, but he also resists any likeness, comparison, or similitude. He cannot be perceived by sense and intellect:

> "Do not however suppose that the Existent [ὄν] which truly exists is [καταλαμβάνεσθαι] apprehended by any man; for we have in us no organ by which we can envisage it, neither in sense, for it is not perceptible by sense, nor yet in mind [νοῦς]. So Moses the explorer of nature which lies beyond our vision [ἀειδής], Moses who, as the divine oracles tell us, entered into the darkness [γνόφος] (Exodus 20:21), by which figure they indicate existence [οὐσία] invisible and incorporeal, searched everywhere and into everything in his desire to see clearly and plainly Him, the object of our much yearning, who alone is good. And when there was no sign of finding aught, not even any semblance [ἰδέα] of what he hoped for, in despair of learning from others, he took refuge with the Object of his search Itself and prayed in these words: 'Reveal Thyself to me that I may see Thee with knowledge (Exodus 33:13).'"[54]

Despite man's effort God stays beyond our capabilities; He is without form since He is incorporeal and His substance is invisible. Getting closer to Him means entering into darkness. Philo exploits Moses's ascend onto Mount Sinai, which will be later so important to Christian tradition, especially for Gregory of Nyssa. As Jean Daniélou points out, the exegesis of Moses's ascend shows that the Holy Scripture remains the basis for Philo, but he explains the words of the Bible using a philosophical language.[55] Philo says that the substance (ὀυσία) is incomprehensible (ἀκατάληπτος), and all the powers of the human soul are not enough to grasp Him.[56] Finally, man can only gain the highest form of knowledge which is: "to apprehend that the God of real Being is apprehensible by no one [ἀκατάληπτος] and to see precisely this, that He is incapable of being seen (ἀόρατος)."[57]

---

53 *Som.*, I, 184 (Colson/Whitaker, vol. 5, pp. 394–395); see also *Cong.* 133–34 (Colson/Whitaker, vol. 4, pp. 526–527).

54 *Mut.* 7–8 (Colson/Whitaker, vol. 5, pp. 144–147).

55 *Cf.* J. Daniélou, *Philo of Alexandria*, tr. J.G. Colbert, Cambridge 2014, p. 115.

56 *Cf. Post.* 13–14 (Colson/Whitaker, vol. 2, pp. 334–337).

57 *Post.* 15 (Colson/Whitaker, vol. 2, pp. 336–337).

Despite claims of absolute incomprehensibility of God's essence, Philo also says that we can know Him thanks to his actions as the Creator and Governor of the Universe. Here, we encounter one of the most difficult fragment of his doctrine – the teaching of the Powers (δυνάμεις).[58] The substance of God, transcendent and impossible to comprehend, is simultaneously present and recognizable in creations. Philo often speaks about two main powers: Kingly and Creative,[59] but he also mentions three other: Injunctive, Prohibitive, and Gracious.[60] The structure of powers is hierarchical, and they play an important role in the ascent of the soul towards God, being at the same time subsequent levels of knowledge. When the faithful ascends towards God, he first encounters the prohibition of sin (Injunctive Power), then obedience of the Law (Prohibitive Power), and then repentance in the face of mercy (Gracious Power); next he acknowledges the sovereignty of God (Kingly Power); and he finally discovers creative love (Creative Power). The knowledge of God is, then, an essential part of Philo's doctrine, where the way of the Powers constitutes a positive way (small mysteries) and the knowledge of the cloud becomes a negative way (higher mysteries).[61] But what the initiate really knows when he approaches those powers? Philo claims that this is not the knowledge of the powers themselves, which stay incomprehensible, like the essence of God, but rather of activities which are the effects of those powers. We can see it in the following fragment of *De posteritate Caini*:

> "This meant that all that follows in the wake of God is within the good man's apprehension (καταληπτά), while He Himself alone is beyond it (ἀκατάληπτος), beyond, that is, in the line of straight and direct approach, a mode of approach by which (had it been possible) His quality would have been made known; but

58 Jean Daniélou (*op. cit.*, pp. 116–117) underlines that for Philo, there are two ways of knowing God. First way depends on Gods actions as Creator and second is possible thanks to ideas (*logos*) which are given to the soul by illumination of Logos. The first one is more important to our study since it is deeply connected to the division between God's essence and his Powers, and activities and will be discussed in chapter 4. Daniélou also underlines that the teaching of the Powers of God stays the most difficult to interpret (*op. cit.*, p. 117).

59 *Abr.* 121 (Colson/Whitaker, vol. 6, pp. 62–63).

60 All five of them are driven from symbolic explanation of the Arc of Covenant *cf. Fug.* 95–104 (F Colson/Whitaker, vol. 5, pp. 60–67).

61 *Cf.* A. Louth, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–25.

brought within ken by the powers that follow and attend Him; for these make evident not His essence but His subsistence from the things which He accomplishes."[62]

Philo then says clearly that the only outcome of man's effort is the knowledge of the subsistence (ὕπαρξιν) of God and that He is the Creator of the Universe.[63] So, not knowing the Face of God, Moses knows "what is behind God" (Ex 30:23), and when God comes before him, he will know the wake (ὀπίσθια) of God. "Wake of God" is for Philo the symbol of what God's action establishes in the world. Despite the lack of clarity and symbolism of Philo's ideas for the first time, we can see how the division between essence and power is used to express the possibility of knowing God. There seems to be no separation between power and action yet, but in his discussion of powers, Philo clearly points out that they must be taken into account when we try to see the Creator and Governor of the Universe because otherwise we must admit that we can gain the knowledge of the essence of God, who stays incomprehensible. Powers, then, are necessary as a consequence of God's incomprehensibility, and as such, they seem to have a philosophical rather than biblical origin. Tracing differences between Philo and Clement of Alexandria, David T. Runia points out that for the former δύναμις is a philosophical term "which allows the exegete to explain and expound activity of God as it is manifested in creation and humanity."[64] So the primary function of Philo's use of the concept of power is to secure incomprehensibility of God's essence rather than to open up the possibility of knowing it. As we shall see, when discussing the meaning of this concept in Clement of Alexandria, Philo's claims on the remoteness and unknowability of God are much more radical than those of his Christian successor, who was so profoundly influenced by him.

---

62 *Post.* 169 (Colson/Whitaker, vol. 2, pp. 428–429).

63 *Post.* 166–167 (Colson/Whitaker, vol. 2, pp. 426–427).

64 D. T. Runia, *Clement of Alexandria and the Philonic Doctrine of the Divine Power(s)*, VCh, vol. 58, no. 3 (Aug. 2004), p. 275. The author also shows that although Philo is primarily an exegete, in Pentateuch, which he comments, the term δύναμις is almost non-existent and Septuagint uses ἰσχύς (strength) rater to describe metaphorical expressions on the strength of God's hand. While Philo refers only to Pentateuch, Clement of Alexandria quotes various texts from the Psalms and the New Testament, which shows a more biblical character of Clement's δύναμις (*Ibid.*, p. 260).

1.3 The apologetic usage of negative theology in the 2nd century

The Bible's ambiguity on whether we can know God is still present in the 2nd century AD. However, the defence of the Christian religion in the Roman Empire brought about a new background to it. Apologists must face pagan religions and answer serious accusations of atheism, immorality, and even cannibalism. Since Romans refuted anything that was new, including new religions, Christian writers try to argue that Christianity is nothing new. The only possible way to do it was to find something in ancient pagan cultures that could be seen close to Christian beliefs. As Benedict XVI notes, Christians did not see any connection between Christianity and pagan religions, but they saw such a link in philosophy.[65] In a way, such connection was obvious since, as we have seen above, St Paul himself suggested that Greek philosophers found God by means of reason. Their fault was only not giving worship and thanks to such Deity. However, showing that Christianity was a philosophy was not enough – it was presented as the only true philosophy. St Justin Martyr is probably the best example of such argumentation. He claims without hesitation that Christianity is "the only sure and useful philosophy."[66] As A.J. Droge points out, the background of this claim could be found in the writings of various Greek philosophers of his time, who viewed philosophy after Aristotle as the history of corruption and decay. Posidonius of Apamea claimed that philosophy was given to humans by gods in primordial times, but later became corrupt and lost its unity by splitting into various schools.[67] But the most interesting similarity can be found in Numenius of Apamea, who not only viewed himself as the restorer of the dogmatic teaching of the Platonic Academy, which

65 Benedict XVI shows the unity of theology and philosophy in early Christianity, which is so deep that it could be seen even in Christian art. *Cf.* Benedict XVI, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, tr. Adrian Walker, San Francisco 1995, pp. 13–16.

66 *Dial.* 8, 1, 4–6 (PTS 47, p. 84; tr. Halton, p. 15).

67 *Cf.* A.J. Droge, *Self-definition vis-à-vis the Graeco-Roman World*, in: *Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 1. *Origins to Constantine*, ed. M.M. Mitchell, F.M. Young, Cambridge 2008, p. 235. A.J. Droge also sees the same idea in Antiochus of Ascalon.

was abandoned by Plato's successors, but also argued for the barbarian sources of philosophy (especially Platonism and Pythagoreanism). The true philosophy of Plato can be restored only by tracing it back to Pythagoras and from Pythagoras to the most ancient barbarians.[68] Numenius precedes Justin in claims of the origins of philosophy in Pentateuch asking: "What is Plato but Moses speaking Attic Greek?"[69] Justin similarly claims that Plato took many ideas from Moses, especially on evil, fate, free will,[70] and on the creation of the universe.[71] He even found in Pentateuch the teaching about the triad of gods which was in a sense Trinitarian.[72] Christian teaching is then something older than all the Greek writers who ever lived.[73] It is also described as the restored philosophy of ancient times unfolded by various philosophical schools which deviated from the truth. Justin shows this clearly when he recounts his philosophical journey through various schools (Stoic, Peripatetic, Pythagorean, and Platonist), which ended in his conversion to Christianity – the true philosophy.[74]

It is significant that Platonism of young Justin, which could be seen in the famous scene of meditation by the sea, was corrected by the old man who used Moses and prophets, but the young Platonic was converted to Christianity, not Judaism.[75] Christianity is truer than philosophy not only because it is older, but it is founded on true revelation of Christ whose teaching contains the true knowledge of God. Justin describes the Incarnation of Christ as theophany and epiphany, and also transforms some pagan models to describe it.[76] Without doubt, he wants to show the Incarnated as the one who reveals and teaches the true knowledge of God that is proclaimed by Christians. Therefore, Justin, as well as other Apologists, claimed that the

68 *Ibid.*, p. 236.
69 Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* I, 150, 4. Τί γάρ ἐστι Πλάτον ἢ Μωυσῆς ἀττικίζων (SC 30, p. 153; tr. ANF, vol. 2, p. 334).
70 *1 Apol.* 44, 1 (Minns/Parvis, pp. 192–193).
71 *Ibid.* 59, 1–5 (Minns/Parvis, pp. 232–233).
72 *Cf.* A.J. Droge, p. 234.
73 *1 Apol.* 23, 1 (Minns/Parvis, pp. 138–139).
74 Justin, *Dial.* 2, 6, 36–43 (PTS 47, p. 73; tr. Halton, pp. 6–7).
75 *Cf.* A.J. Droge, *op. cit.*, p. 231.
76 *Cf.* C.H. Talbert, *The Development of Christology during the First Hundred Years*, Leiden, Boston 2011, pp. 21–22. Justin Christology is also often perceived as "an appropriation of the Stoic logos thought" (pp. 98–99).

knowledge of God is possible and was very careful not to rely too much on using negative terms in showing how Christians know Him. Such an approach could be seen already in the Letter to Diognetus, where Christ is presented as the one who provides the knowledge of God: "For, who of men at all understood before His coming what God is?"[77] Arguing against the accusations that Christians are atheists, Justin claims that it was Christ who taught them the true worship of true God.[78]

Nevertheless, there is one place where negative theology seemed to be indispensable. It helped to distinguish the true Christian God from the false pagan gods, which often appears in a wider perspective of the accusation that Christians are atheists and negative theology is used in the writings of Apologists almost exclusively in this context.[79] The same accusation of atheism is for Justin not only an occasion to indicate Christ as the source of the knowledge of God, but also so-called Christian "atheism" is in fact the rejection of pagan deities, who are corruptible and in need of man's care. On the contrary, the Christian God does not need any material offerings and is "called by no proper name."[80] Justin repeats this statement in *Second Apology*, but this time the lack of the proper name of God is derived from the fact that he is unbegotten:

> "However, the Father of all has no given name, since he is unbegotten. For whoever is addressed by some name has as older than him the one who gave him the

77 *Ep. ad Diog.* 8, 1 (SC 33, pp. 70–71; tr. ANF, vol. 1, p. 28).

78 Justin, *1 Apol.* 13, 3 (Minns/Parvis, pp. 110–111); 23, 2 (pp. 136–137).

79 D.W. Palmer underlines that the proper understanding of the usage of negative theology in the writings of Apologists of the 2nd century is possible only with regard to the goals of their works and claims: "When modern scholars have given attention to the apologists' use of negative theology, they have frequently fitted it into a systematic framework, which is not in keeping with the method and purpose of the apologists themselves" (*Atheism*, *Apologetic*, *and Negative Theology in the Greek Apologists of the Second Century*, VCh, vol. 37, no. 3 (Sep. 1983), p. 236). R. Mortley challenges Palmer's opinion. He argues that Justin the Martyr's theology confirms that negative theology was not limited to refuting the false pagan gods, but also had a more systematic formulation (*cf.* R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 33–34).

80 *1 Apol.* 10,1, 6. τῷ μηδενὶ ὀνόματι θετῷ καλουμένῳ (Minns/Parvis, pp. 96–98; tr. ANF, vol. 1, p. 165).

> name. But 'father' and 'god' and 'creator' and 'lord' and 'master' are not names, but appellations derived from his beneficence and works."[81]

Thus Justin claims that those words are mere expressions (προσρήσεις), and they rather describe the deeds and works of God (τῶν εὐποιϊῶν καὶ τῶν ἔργων). What is interesting in the context of the Arian controversy is that Justin clearly thinks that the term "unbegotten" has a strong negative meaning. The name "Christ" also refers to the one who is unknown:

> "This name also has an unknown meaning, just as the designation 'god' is not a name but a notion implanted in the nature of human beings about something difficult to set forth."[82]

Such a negative statement that name "Christ" has in fact an unknown significance (ἄγνωστον σημασίαν) is rather surprising when formulated by one of the Apologists, who want to defend the truth and fullness of Christian revelation. Although man cannot know its significance, it is somehow implanted in human nature as an opinion (ἔμφυτος τῇ φύσει τῶν ἀνθρώπων δόξα). Therefore, it is not of human origin and this opinion could be seen as an earlier formulation of the theory of names, which was the key doctrine of Anomeans during the Arian controversy.

It is not clear whether Justin builds negative theology here, or simply wants to refute the accusations aimed at Christian beliefs, but we can observe a similar pattern in the writings of other Apologists.[83] Tatian argues that God is neither visible nor comprehensible by human skill, and he has no name; therefore, the Apologist is not willing to worship anything which is created by God (stars, elements), or by man (idols).[84] The most systematic rejection of the accusation that Christians were atheists was

81 *2 Apol.* 5(6), 1, 1–2, 3. Ὄνομα δὲ τῷ πάντων πατρὶ θετόν, ἀγεννήτῳ ὄντι, οὐκ ἔστιν· ᾧ γὰρ ἂν καὶ ὄνομά τι προσαγορεύηται, πρεσβύτερον ἔχει τὸν θέμενον τὸ ὄνομα. τὸ δὲ πατὴρ καὶ θεὸς καὶ κτίστης καὶ κύριος καὶ δεσπότης οὐκ ὀνόματά ἐστιν, ἀλλ' ἐκ τῶν εὐποιϊῶν καὶ τῶν ἔργων προσρήσεις (Minns/Parvis, pp. 284–285).

82 *2 Apol.* 5(6), 3, 5–8. ὄνομα καὶ αὐτὸ περιέχον ἄγνωστον σημασίαν, ὃν τρόπον καὶ τὸ θεὸς προσαγόρευμα οὐκ ὄνομά ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ πράγματος δυσεξηγήτου ἔμφυτος τῇ φύσει τῶν ἀνθρώπων δόξα (Minns/Parvis, pp. 286–287).

83 J.R. Lyman sees the similarities in stressing God's otherness in Justin and Irenaeus, *cf. Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius*, Oxford 1993, p. 26.

84 Tatian, *Or. ad Graec.* 4, 1–3 (PTS 43/44. p. 13; tr. ANF, vol. 2, p. 66).

presented by Athenagoras in his *Plea for the Christians*. He divides the answer to the charge into the consideration of theoretical and practical atheism.[85] For him the charge of atheism is irrational since Christians distinguish God from matter and thus it can only be seen by reason.[86] In such claims, Christians are in agreement with the philosophers, chiefly Pythagoras, who said that God was an "ineffable number," and Plato, who also thought that the maker of the universe had been uncreated God.[87] Such God must be perceived as "uncreated, impassible and indivisible; therefore, not consisting of parts."[88] Rejecting the accusations of practical atheism, he uses standard arguments that Christians do not worship idols because they are creations made by man. He also makes a distinction between the statues of gods and gods themselves, and claims that the gods of myths are perishable and, therefore, they cannot really exist.[89] The gods worshiped by the Greeks are corporeal and, therefore, they have humanlike passions (such as anger and desires), whereas true God is incorporeal and free from passions.[90] Athenagoras also uses the Stoic belief of final conflagration of all things, which results in the destruction of all material deities. As D.W. Palmer points out "negative theology is used to counter not only the gods of Greek myth, but also the philosophical interpretations of myth and Stoic religious philosophy."[91] The most interesting use of negative theology in the context of any possible knowledge of God is that of Theophilus of Antioch, who addressed his apology to pagan Autolycus. He asked Theophilus to describe to him God in whom he believes; therefore, he starts his discussion with the presentation of the Christian idea of deity. True God can be seen only by the man whose soul is pure, and the eyes of the soul can see only

---

85 *Libellus pro christianis* 4–12 (SC 379, pp. 82–111).
86 *Libellus pro christianis* 4, 1–2 (SC 379, pp. 82–84).
87 *Libellus pro christianis* 6, 1–2 (SC 379, pp. 86–88).
88 *Libellus pro christianis* 8, 3. (SC, 379, pp. 94–95; tr. ANF, vol 2, p. 132). Later on, in conclusion, he adds that: "It has been adequately shown by me that we are not atheists, since we believe in one God, uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible and illimitable, comprehended by mind and reason alone…" (10, 1; SC, 379, pp. 100–101; tr. ANF, vol. 2, p. 133).
89 *Libellus pro christianis* 19, 1–2 (SC 379, pp. 130–132).
90 *Libellus pro christianis* 21, 1 (SC 379, pp. 138–139).
91 D.W. Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

when the man is free from sin and evil deeds.[92] God cannot be seen with the eyes of the flesh and, therefore, "the appearance of God is ineffable and indescribable."[93] But seeing Him through the eyes of the soul does not provide any positive knowledge: "For in glory He is incomprehensible, in greatness unfathomable, in height inconceivable, in power incomparable, in wisdom unrivalled, in goodness inimitable, in kindness unutterable."[94] If there is any knowledge which is possible, it can only be based on what is derived from God. Thus, Theophilus writes:

> "For if I say He is Light, I name but His own work; if I call Him Word, I name but His sovereignty; if I call Him Mind, I speak but of His wisdom; if I say He is Spirit, I speak of His breath; if I call Him Wisdom, I speak of His offspring; if I call Him Strength, I speak of His sway; if I call Him Power, I am mentioning His activity (δύναμιν ἐάν εἴπω, ἐνέργειαν αὐτοῦ λέγω); if Providence, I but mention His goodness; if I call Him Kingdom, I but mention His glory; if I call Him Lord, I mention His being judge; if I call Him Judge, I speak of Him as being just; if I call Him Father, I speak of all things as being from Him; if I call Him Fire, I but mention His anger."[95]

Theophilus then testifies that at this early stage of Christian reflection on God to know His nature is possible through His attributes. He also seems to suggest that even the attributes of God are only vaguely known to us. We rather know how an attribute is connected with the corresponding activity in created world. Saying that God is light we rather say something about how it is visible in His works, calling Him word means rather His sovereignty, etc. Among those attributes, we also find the Power of God

92 *Ad Autol.* I, 2, 3 (SC 20, pp. 60–61).
93 *Ad Autol.* I, 3, 2–3. τὸ μὲν εἶδος τοῦ θεοῦ ἄρρητον καὶ ἀνέκφραστόν ἐστιν (SC 20, pp. 62–63; tr. ANF, vol. 2, p. 89).
94 *Ad Autol.* I, 3, 4–6. δόξῃ γάρ ἐστιν ἀχώρητος, μεγέθει ἀκατάληπτος, ὕψει ἀπερινόητος, ἰσχύϊ ἀσύγκριτος, σοφίᾳ ἀσυμβίβαστος, ἀγαθωσύνῃ ἀμίμητος, καλοποιΐᾳ ἀνεκδιήγητος (SC 20, pp. 62–63; tr. ANF, vol. 2, p. 89).
95 *Ad Autol.* I, 3, 2, 6–13. εἰ γὰρ φῶς αὐτὸν εἴπω, ποίημα αὐτοῦ λέγω· εἰ λόγον εἴπω, ἀρχὴν αὐτοῦ λέγω· νοῦν ἐὰν εἴπω, φρόνησιν αὐτοῦ λέγω·πνεῦμα ἐὰν εἴπω, ἀναπνοὴν αὐτοῦ λέγω· σοφίαν ἐὰν εἴπω, γέννημα αὐτοῦ λέγω· ἴσχυν ἐὰν εἴπω, κράτος αὐτοῦ λέγω· δύναμιν ἐὰν εἴπω, ἐνέργειαν αὐτοῦ λέγω· πρόνοιαν ἐὰν εἴπω, ἀγαθωσύνην αὐτοῦ λέγω· βασιλείαν ἐὰν εἴπω, δόξαν αὐτοῦ λέγω· κύριον ἐὰν εἴπω, κριτὴν αὐτὸν λέγω· κριτὴν ἐὰν εἴπω, δίκαιον αὐτὸν λέγω· πατέρα ἐὰν εἴπω, τὰ πάντα αὐτὸν λέγω· πὺρ ἐὰν εἴπω, τὴν ὀργὴν αὐτοῦ λέγω (SC 20, pp. 62–64; tr. ANF, vol. 2, pp. 89–90).

(δύναμις), which is known thanks to God's activity (ἐνέργεια). Theophilus does not specify the kind of activity and does not explain what he means by this particular one. But it is important to note that like other enlisted attributes, activity is a comprehensible effect of the incomprehensible power of God. Theophilus repeats this in the fifth chapter and provides various metaphors to show that since human eyes cannot see the invisible God, He is beheld and perceived through His providence and works.[96] Man cannot even look upon the Sun, so it is all the more difficult to see the glory of God.[97] However, it is possible indirectly, like the existence of the soul, which can be recognized only by seeing the movements of the body. Similarly, seeing a ship sailing in the sea, one presumes that there is somebody who steers her. The government of the world and providence of God are also compared to an earthly ruler who is not seen by everybody, but everybody presumes his existence by his laws, ordinances, forces, and statues.[98] The Apologist also provides a very interesting metaphor of a pomegranate, which is composed of the rind containing many cells with seeds inside. In the same manner, the whole universe is like those seeds contained in the spirit of God.

> "As, therefore, the seed of the pomegranate, dwelling inside, cannot see what is outside the rind, itself being within; so neither can man, who along with the whole creation is enclosed by the hand of God, behold God."[99]

All those metaphors are presented to prove that direct cognition of God is impossible, but still we are able recognize Him vaguely by the effects of His works. In the next chapter, Theophilus describes the beauty and harmony of creation which is a visible testimony of the glory and greatness of God,[100] and after a short exposure of the need for believing in such great God who creates man, he passes to typical criticism of idolatry. It is worth mentioning that he also attacks major Greek thinkers including Plato, Stoics, and

96 *Ad Autol.* I, 5, 19–20. Apologist asks how Autolycus cannot admit the existence of such God seeing his works and power: Τὸν δὲ θεὸν οὐ βούλει σὺ νοεῖσθαι διὰ ἔργον καὶ δυνάμεων (SC 20, p. 68).
97 *Ad Autol.* I, 5, 9–10 (SC 20, pp. 66–69).
98 *Ad Autol.* I, 5, 6–8 (SC 20, p. 66).
99 *Ad Autol.* I, 5, 10,14 (SC 20, p. 66; tr. ANF, vol 2, p. 90).
100 *Ad Autol.* I, 6, 1–7, 1 (SC 20, pp. 70–73).

Epicureans. He claims that they were atheists and doing that he intends to defend Christians accused with the same charge.[101]

D.W. Palmer notes that the use of negative theology by the Apologists of the 2nd century was significant, and its source was undoubtedly contemporary Middle Platonism, but at the same time, it was very selective.[102] Their intention was not to give the systematic teaching about the nature of God and of how we can conceive it, but it rather served a particular purpose of defending Christianity. However, it is also noticeable that the difficulty of knowing God is contrasted with Christian Revelation. Thanks to the teaching of Jesus, this difficulty is overcome, and Christians not only know the truth about God but also know better how to worship Him and gain final happiness in the afterlife. There is yet another aspect which is important. The Apologists underlined that God's glory and greatness is visible in His creations and in the way they are governed by providence. Such reasoning which leads from the works of God to God Himself, from the creations to the Creator helped to distinguish Christian God from false gods. Even if pagans are unable to accept the Christian belief, they surely should conceive on philosophical ground that the harmony of the Universe leads to the acceptance of its Maker and Governor.

1.4 Clement of Alexandria – the unknown Father revealed in the Son of God

In the writings of Clement of Alexandria, Christian theodicy was finally freed from the strictly apologetic context and acquired a more systematic shape. He, of course, wanted to preach the Gospel to the Greeks, but he intended to do it by making a methodical inquiry into the nature of God. Eric Osborn proposes to read Clement's understanding of God in the light of the prologue to the Gospel of John, especially verse 1:18,[103] which shows two aspects of God's nature. God was not seen by anyone; thus, He is unknown, but the Son of God made Him known to mankind. This verse not only raises the question of how God can be known, but states

101 *Ad Autol.* II, 4 (SC 20, pp. 102–104); III, 2, 6 (SC 20, pp. 206–208); III, 6 (SC 20, pp. 214–216).

102 *Cf.* D.W. Palmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 251–252.

103 *Cf.* E. Osborn, *op. cit.*, pp. 111, 113.

strictly that He is unknown and can be revealed only by the Son of God. Therefore, the writings of Clement of Alexandria are important for our study since the question is raised in the context of the relationships of the Divine Persons and a distinction between theology and economy. Analysing Clement's exegesis of J 17:21–26, Eric Osborn says that the Father of the Church speaks of God beyond God (the Father), God within God (the Son) and God beside God (the Son of God incarnated), and that he turns to philosophy in an attempt to shed some light onto the dilemma of one God being two Persons.[104]

The key to understanding Clement's use of negative theology is his reference to the hypotheses of Plato's *Parmenides* and their explanation presented by Middle Platonists. *Parmenides* is a dialogue with the reputation of being the most difficult to understand.[105] However, there are two main hypotheses on the nature of the One in the second part of the dialogue. The first one is the principle of unity which transcends all plurality to such an extent that it refuses every predicate. We cannot even say of it that it exists.[106] The second one is the unity of parts, which contains in it the "seeds of contraries – a principle which, if we grant it existence, proceeds to pluralize itself indefinitely in the universe of existent unities."[107] In the interpretation of Middle Platonists, those two hypotheses were seen as two Gods who are two main principles of reality. Fiskå Hägg says that there were three main thinkers who forged the Middle Platonic doctrine of the divine: Alcinous, Numenius, and Atticus, and that the latter is often regarded as the most

104 *Ibid.*, pp. 112–113.

105 In the 5th century AD, Neoplatonic Proclus reported that there were four interpretations of *Parmenides*: two metaphysical and two logical (*cf.* H.A.S. Tarrant, *Plato's First Interpreters*, New York 2000, p. 185). This dialogue constantly focuses scholars' interest, and new interpretations are proposed. C.C. Meinwald mentions two common types of approach (*Good-bye to the Third Man*, in: *Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. R. Kraut, Cambridge 1992, pp. 366–367). Recently, a new interpretation was proposed by Graham Priest (*The Parmenides: a Dialetheic Interpretation*, in: *Plato*, *The Electronic Journal of the International Plato Society*, 12, 2012, p. 1).

106 *Parm.* 141 E-142 A (Hermann, pp. 124–125).

107 E.R. Doods, *The Parmenides of Plato and the Origin of Neoplatonic One*, CQ 22 (1928), p. 132.

typical representative of their doctrine.[108] Unfortunately, the most typical does not mean the clearest. There have been some differences among scholars about how to understand his teaching on first principles. We will come back to Middle Platonists in the next part of our study, but for now, it is important to note that the relation between the two principles is unclear.[109] In Chapter 10 of *Didaskalikos*, Alcinous treats God as the third of first principles (two others are matter and ideas). He argues that there must be divine intellect that thinks the ideas. But this divine intellect is twofold. The intellect which thinks of the ideas is an active intellect, but there must also exist the intellect which transcends any substratum and this highest principle is the same with the unmoved mover of Aristotle.[110] First, the intellect thinks of itself (contemplates itself), and this is the most supreme activity, which is motionless and directed towards the second intellect. Such God is simultaneously characterized by Platonic terms and forms the combined notion of good from the *Republic*, and *Philebus*, with the demiurge from *Timaeus*. He is characterized by two fundamental attributes of ineffability (ἄρρητος) and eternity (ἀΐδιος) and lesser ones like being self-perfect

108 H. Fiskå Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism*, Oxford 2014, pp. 93–97.

109 Eric Osborn strongly opposes A.J. Festiguière's interprétation of the Medioplatonic teaching on the First Principles (*La révélation d`Hermès Trismégeste*, *IV*, *Le dieu inconnu et la gnôse*, Paris 1986, pp. 92–140). He notices that the example of Clement's usage of the Middle Platonic teaching shows the clarity of their interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides* (E. Osborn, *op. cit.*, pp. 121–122). Referring to the doctrine of Alcinous, Fiskå Hägg notes that: "there is little doubt that there exist in the *Didascalicus* two conflicting views on the nature of the first God, most probably due to the complication from different sources" (F. Hägg, *op. cit.*, p. 105). What he calls conflicting views for E. Osborn is the "ultimate duality" and reciprocity of the first principles, where the first god cannot exist without the other (E. Osborn, *op. cit.*, pp. 115; 122). I will follow E. Osborn's interpretation in my inquiry, because it seems clearer and better explains the Middle Platonic doctrine.

110 *Didasc.* X, 164, 10–27 (Wittaker, p. 22). As A.H. Armstrong points out, this is the first time when Aristotle's concept of the Prime Unmoved Mover was incorporated into Platonic theology (*The Background of the Doctrine that Intelligibles Are Not Outside the Intellect*, in: *Les sources de Plotin*, Entretiens Hardt, vol. 5, Vandoeuvres, Geneva, 1960, p. 402).

(αὐτοτελής), ever-perfect (ἀειτελής), and all-perfect (παντελής).[111] Alcinous also says that the first God can be also characterized as the divinity (θείοτης), essentiality (οὐσιότης), truth (ἀλήθεια), commensurability (συμμετρία), and good (ἀγαθόν). All those attributes are not distinct because they characterize the same object.[112] The first way of understanding God is a negative one (ἀφαίρεσις), since He is ineffable, and can be grasped partially by intellect only when all categories of Aristotle are denied of Him. Therefore, intellect cannot form any scientific knowledge on Him, and can grasp Him only in an intuitive way.[113] Therefore, any description of the first hypothesis of Parmenides can be applied to Him, since He transcends all opposites such as good/bad, qualified/unqualified, part/whole, etc. The negative way is ἀφαίρεσις – an abstraction, which means that all attributes must be denied of the first God to reach Him.[114] God is also without parts, without motion, and without body. The former two negative descriptions are also based on the arguments from Plato's dialogues,[115] while the third one is made by Alcinous himself. The second God – second Intellect – is the place where ideas dwell because ideas are the thoughts of this intellect. Since there is intellect, there also must be the object of intellect. As E. Osborn puts it: "if God is *nous* there also must be *noeton*."[116] The second intellect has all the properties of the second hypothesis of Parmenides. It generates all beings is in motion and is connected with both the sensible and the intelligible.[117]

The doctrine of incomprehensibility of God in Middle Platonism brings about new conceptions in the development of Plato's teaching. As Fiskå Hägg points out, Plato himself never used the term "ineffable," but this expression is the central point of Alcinous' negative theology.[118] Although

111 E. Osborn, *op. cit.*, p. 119.
112 *Didasc.* X, 164, 31–42 (Wittaker, p. 23).
113 E. Osborn, *op. cit.*, p. 120.
114 *Didasc.* X, 165, 5–15. (Whittaker, p. 24). The negative way is supported by the way of analogy (Alcinous uses for illustration the analogy of the Sun – *Republic* 507 F) and the way of preeminence (here, he refers to the description of ultimate Beauty – *Symposium* 201 A).
115 God without parts refers to *Parm.* 137 C; *Soph.* 245 A, immobile to *Parm.* 138 B - 139 B; *Resp.* 380 D-F.
116 E. Osborn, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
117 *Ibid.*, p. 116.
118 H. Fiskå Hägg, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

there are doubts whether this theology can be called truly apophatic, he himself calls his method ἀφαίρεσις and explains it using a geometrical example of getting to the point by cutting off the plane, surface, and line.[119] The problem is whether the use of such method is sufficient to admit that the First God is perceived in a truly negative way.[120] Nevertheless, Alcinous admits that there is a possibility to know God by an intuitive way, and he does not hesitate to call Him substance or being. There is yet another aspect which allows to treat the negative theology of Alcinous and Middle Platonism in general as a less radical version of negative theology, because the first God is placed within the realm of intellect, not above it.[121]

For Clement of Alexandria, negative theology seems to have a more important role to play when man tries to reach God. The aphaeretic method is used in the famous fragment of *Stromata* in the context of the soul ascending to God. He evokes pagan mysteries which start with purification and are followed with the teaching aimed at preparing an adept for the next stage. The higher mysteries grant a higher kind of intuitive knowledge (νοήσις), which consists in seeing rather than reasoning.[122] For Christians, purification means the confession of sins, but next steps are similar: they must engage in reasoning which would lead to the first concept (πρώτην νόησιν). Such reasoning is in fact cutting off subsequent elements in an

---

119 *Didasc.* X, 165, 16–19. Ἔσται δὴ πρώτη μὲν αὐτοῦ νόεσις ἡ κατὰ ἀφαίρεσιν τούυων, ὅπως καὶ σημεῖον ἐνοήσαμεν κατὰ ἀφαίρεσιν ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ, ἐπιφάνειαν νοήσαντες, εἶτα γραμμήν, καὶ τελευταῖον τὸ σημεῖον (Whittaker, p. 24). "The first way of conceiving God is by abstraction of these attributes, just as we form the conception of a point by abstraction from sensible phenomena, conceiving first a surface, then a line, and finally a point" (tr. Dillon, p. 18).

120 D. Carabine refers to a discussion about the origin and significance of this method in Alkinous between A.H. Wolfson who states that Middle Platonist took this method from Euclid and J. Whittaker, who sees its Pythagorean origin. There is also a question of how it refers to Aristotle's understanding of abstraction (D. Carabine, *op. cit.*, pp. 76–78).

121 D. Carabine, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

122 *Strom.* V, 11, 71, 2 (GCS 15, pp. 374; 5–6). See also, A. Van den Hoek, *Good beyond Knowing: Clement of Alexandria and Discourse on God*, in: *God in Early Christian Thought*, ed. A.B. Mc Govan, B.E. Daley, T.J. Gaden, Leiden, Boston 2009, p. 43.

abstract fashion. It is the rejection of bodily properties: depth, width, and length, which leads to a point which must be conceived non-materially as a mental point (νοεῖται μονάς).[123] Finally:

> "If, then, abstracting all that belongs to bodies and things called incorporeal, we cast ourselves into the greatness of Christ, and thence advance into void (ἀχανὲς) by holiness, we may reach somehow to the conception of the Almighty, knowing not what He is, but what He is not (οὐχ ὅ ἐστιν, ὃ δὲ μή ἐστι γνωρίσαντες)."[124]

In another fragment, Clement shows a similar usage of the method of dialectic, which also allows to follow up step by step to the most ultimate substance (τὴν πάντων κρατίστην οὐσίαν).[125] Dialectic can lead to true wisdom, but for Christians, even this method is impossible without the help of the Divine Logos, who purifies the soul from the remains of ignorance caused by sinful life. Only Christ can show the Father to whom He pleases, and the ultimate seeing of God comes from the Son of God alone.[126] God is also beyond any of human categories, because He is "neither a genus, nor a species, nor an individual, nor a number, and on the other hand is neither an accident nor that to which an accident pertains."[127] God is then beyond any kind of human knowledge,[128] but in all those fragments, we can see the ambiguity of Clement's claims on the knowledge of God. On the one hand "The First Cause is not then in space, but above both space and time, and name, and conception. Wherefore also Moses says, 'Show yourself to me', intimating most clearly that God is not capable of being taught by man, or expressed in speech, but to be known only by His own power (δυνάμει)" – meaning that God is incomprehensible, but at the same time God can be known thanks to grace given through Christ: "For inquiry was obscure and dim; but the grace of knowledge is from Him by the Son."[129] Incomprehensibility then can somehow be overwhelmed by grace, which makes it possible to see God who is above all knowledge.

---

123 *Strom.* V, 11, 71, 2 (GCS 15, pp. 374; 11).
124 *Strom.* V, 11, 71, 3–4 (GCS 15, p. 374, 11–15; tr. ANF, vol. 2, p. 461).
125 *Strom.* I, 28, 177,1 (GCS 15, p. 109, 8).
126 *Strom.* I, 28, 178,1 (GCS 15, pp. 109; 20–25).
127 *Strom.* V, 12, 81, 5 (GCS 15, p. 380, 18–20; tr. ANF, vol. 2, p. 463).
128 In the *Protreptic*, Clement uses negative theology in the Apologist way explaining that He is beyond any idols (E. Osborn, *op. cit.*, p. 123).
129 *Strom.* V, 11, 71, 4 (GCS 15, pp. 374; 22–25; tr. ANF, vol. 2, p. 461).

This fragment is also crucial for the entire tradition of Christian theology because Clement makes a distinction between the essence and power of God and admits that it is possible to know God by His power. This seems to be the first step to what in the 4th century would become knowing the energies of God. But for Clement himself, this distinction, which is consistent with the theory of *creatio ex nihilo*, explains not only the transcendental character of the essence of God, but also shows that He is very close to the creations. In His essence, He is remote, but is very close and accessible to us in His power.[130] As we know, Clement refers to Philo's conception of the Powers of God, but he significantly modifies it.[131] David T. Runia notes, on the example of multiple quotations from the Holy Scripture, that for Clement "the term *dynamis* is biblical and represents the concept shared by the Scripture and the philosophers."[132] The fragment of *Stromata* quoted above shows that Clement prefers to speak of one power rather than many powers of God, and one of the reasons for this is to secure a proper character of our knowledge of God. He admits that God has many names, and we can call Him One, Good, Being, Intellect and the Father, but none of those names should be taken as His definitive name since they all only indicate the infinite power of God.[133]

There is, however, yet another significant change in the doctrine of Divine Power. David T. Runia suggests that although for both Philo and Clement God is present in His Creations by His Power, Clement has a more positive attitude when describing its role in keeping us away from the remote essence of God. Referring to the mysterious expression of δυνάμει δύναμις from *Stromata* II, 5,5, David T. Runia suggests that Clement wishes to emphasize the presence of God in the form of the Logos who is our instructor and guide.[134] It could be seen in the above-quoted text referring to the ascent of Moses, where a long fragment on transcendence and incomprehensibility of God ends with the following phrase: "but the grace of knowledge is

---

130 A. C. Itter, *Esoteric Teaching in the Stromateis of Clement of Alexandria*, Leiden, Boston 2009, pp. 168–169.

131 *Cf.* D. T. Runia, *Clement of Alexandria and the Philonic Doctrine of the Divine Power(s)…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 261–263.

132 *Ibid.*, p. 260.

133 *Strom.* V, 12, 82, 1–2 (GCS 15, pp. 380; 25–81; 5).

134 D.T. Runia, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

from Him by the Son."[135] This is a characteristic difference between Philo and Clement. While the former connects the powers with the creation and presence of God in the cosmos, the latter uses the power to describe how we can know unknowable God in the Divine Logos – the Son of God. This indicates that for Clement the ultimate manifestation of the power and action of God is not the Creation and Governing of the Universe, but the act of Incarnation and the salvific activity of Christ.[136] This shift of perspective to the Christian one also includes the conviction that man can experience to much broader extent the divine power as an active agent in his life. That is why while for Philo one of the main functions of divine powers was to secure incomprehensibility of God's essence, for Clement (although this aspect is still present) another role of power is more important – an in-depth connection between the power and the Logos perceived in a new Christian way. As the expression and realization of the divine power, the Logos now overrides incomprehensibility by means of grace.

The primary concept in Clement is thus reciprocity of the Father and Son. Eric Osborn underlines that the same duality of the first cause is found in Middle Platonists, such as Moderatus and Alcinous. They also understood their first principle as having a dual nature, both simple and transcendent, as well as multiple and inclusive. Later, in the Neoplatonic system of Plotinus, those aspects were separated to make up two different hypostases, but for Clement, such twofold nature of the first principle perfectly fits Christian theology, having its sources in the prologue of the Gospel of John.[137] Such a view on the nature of God is also the reason why Clement's apophatic statements are much weaker than those which we will see in the writings that sprung from the confrontation with Eunomius. But Clement saw no need for such a tight formulation of relations between the Father and the Son as it was later forced by the radical claims of Anomeans, and Middle Platonism was a great tool for explaining reciprocity of the Father and the Son as a twofold account of the divine mind.[138] In his writings, he describes God with the term οὐσία as Middle Platonists did. He also goes a step

135 *Strom.* V, 71, 3–5 (GCS 15, p. 374, 23–24; tr. ANF, vol. 2, p. 461).
136 D.T. Runia, *op. cit.*, pp. 267–270.
137 *Cf.* E. Osborn, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
138 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

further because he seems to be closer to the famous Platonic expression of the First cause as beyond being (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας).[139] But in his writings, he does not explicitly pose the question, which is so crucial in the discussion with Eunomius, about the possibility of knowing the essence of God.

1.5 The incomprehensible Father in Origen

Before we turn to the Arian conflict at the beginning of the 4th century, it is necessary to have a quick look at yet another phase of the shaping of early Christian doctrine of God which could be observed in the writings of Origen. Although he is not recognized as having influence on the development of negative theology, his statements about the knowledge of the Father and the Son are very important because of their influence on the theology of Arius and all of the Alexandrian tradition. Origen is also a very important participant in the discussion between Greek philosophy and Christian dogma. Traces of that discussion are to be observed in *Peri archon*, which can be interpreted as a Christian answer to the Platonic accusation that they believe in God as having a corporeal nature.[140] Origen seems to be aware of the discussion going on in philosophical schools on the nature of light,[141] whether it is corporeal or not, but what is more important he uses the example of light to show that man cannot comprehend God. Clearly referring to the Sun Simile of the *Republic*, Origen writes:

> "For whatever may be the knowledge which we have been able to obtain about God, whether by perception or reflection, we must of necessity believe that he is far and away better than our thoughts about him. For if we see a man who can scarcely look at a glimmer or the light of the smallest lamp, and if we wish to teach such a one, whose eyesight is not strong enough to receive more light than

---

139 *Cf*. H. Fiskå Hägg commentary on the use and meaning of οὐσία by Middle Platonists and Clement (*op. cit*., pp. 164–179) and his commentary on Clement being close to famous Plato's statement in the *Republic* 509 B (*op. cit*., p. 175).

140 Such interpretation was proposed by J. Dillon, who argues that the understanding of God as light in *Peri archon* shows complicated relations which Origen had with contemporary Platonism. *Cf*., *The Knowledge of God in Origen*, in: *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. R. van den Broeck, T. Baarda, J. Mansfeld, Leiden: Brill 1988, p. 221.

141 *Cf*. J. Dillon, *op. cit*., pp. 222–223.

> we have said, about the brightness and splendour of the sun, shall we not have to tell him that the splendour of the sun is unspeakably and immeasurably better and more glorious than all this light he can see?"[142]

Origen then admits that human mind cannot grasp the essence of God, and no object present in human cognition can give man a means to grasp His nature. But this does not make him turn to negative theology and use of negative language. It seems that impossibility of knowing God is not essential to him. It is best seen in the fragment of the *Commentary of John* where he speaks about darkness which man meets on the mystical path leading towards God. On the one hand: "For if someone should perceive the mass speculations about God, and the mass of knowledge which is incomprehensible to human nature, and to other creatures too, perhaps except Christ and the Holy Spirit, he will know that darkness surrounds God,"[143] but this darkness is not something final and permanent which stays and awaits man ascending to God at the end, because on the other hand, this darkness finally becomes light.[144] Therefore, it seems that Origen does not want to admit that God is ultimately unknown, but on the contrary, he frequently talks about knowing or seeing God.[145] But the fragment above shows well the aspect of his doctrine which he shared with the entire Alexandrian tradition. God is incomprehensible to all creation, but is known by the Logos

142 *De Princ.* I, 1, 5, 116–125. "Si quid enim illud est, quod, sentire vel intellegere de deo potuerimus, multis longe modis eum meliorem esse ab eo quod sensimus necesse est credi. Sicut enim si uideamus aliquem uix posse scintillam luminis aut breuissimae lucernae lumen aspicere et eum, cuius acies oculorum plus luminis capere quam supra diximus non valet, si uelimus de claritate ac splendore solis edocere, nonne oportebit nos ei dicere quia omni hoc lumine quod uides ineffabiliter et inaestimabiliter melior ac praestantior solis est splendor?" (SC 252, 96–98; tr. ANF, vol. 4, p. 243).

143 *In Ioann.* II, 28, 172. Ἐὰν γάρ τις κατανοήσῃ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν περὶ θεοῦ θεωρημάτων καὶ γνώσεως ἄληπτον τυγχάνον ἀνθρωπίνῃ φύσει, τάχα δὲ καὶ ἑτέροις παρὰ Χριστὸν καὶ τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα γενητοῖς, εἴσεται πῶς περὶ τὸν θεόν ἐστι σκότος (SC 120, p. 322–324; tr. FCH, 80, p. 141).

144 *In Ioann.* II, 28, 174. εἶναι ἐν φωτί, ἀπαγγέλλειν παντὶ τῷ γινομένῳ φωτί (SC 120, 324).

145 *Cf.* A. Louth, *op. cit.*, pp. 70–71.

and the Spirit.[146] As we will see in the next chapter, this is fundamentally different from what Arius will say about the knowledge that the Son has of the Father. But we can also observe here the same pattern which we saw in Clement of Alexandria. While God is incomprehensible, the Son of God, who is the Logos, can be grasped by the mind, and he reveals to some extent the nature of God. Origen constantly tests the idea of the Logos, which constitutes the means to attain the knowledge of God.[147] It seems that he never formulated an ultimate answer to this dilemma, though he certainly saw the difference between the unknowability of the Father and the knowledge which we can attain about the Logos.

146 The role of Christ as a mediator who allows man to have the knowledge of the Father has been well described recently, *cf.* J.M. Robertson, *Christ as Mediator. A Study of the Theologies of Eusebius of Caesarea*, *Marcellus of Ancyra and Athanasius of Alexandria*, Oxford 2007, pp. 34–36.

147 *Cf.* J.M. Dillon, *op. cit.*, p. 226. J. Dillon notes that Origen also seems to be aware of the development of the Platonic concept of the possibility to know God.

2. Incomprehensibility of God in the First Phase of the Arian Controversy

2.1 The knowledge of God in Arius

2.1.1 The problem of Platonism of Arius

We can observe that in the 3rd century, the use of negative terms ascribed to God by Christian writers was expanding. But, likewise, Christians widely used philosophical terms and concepts to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son. It is also clear that Christian writers had problems, similar to Philo's, concerning the Biblical doctrine of creation which had been absent in ancient thought, and must have been distinguished from the idea of the construction of the Universe already present in Plato. The situation seemed to be similar at the beginning of the 4th century when Christian writers became more aware of the problems with the use of the Platonic thought to explain the dogmas, especially given the rise of new heresies and most of all Arianism. We face here a difficult problem of the philosophical sources of Arius, which seems to be of utmost importance when one tries to understand the role of negative theology in his system. The question of what type of Platonism influenced Arius is crucial for our discussion because of profound differences between Middle-Platonism and Neoplatonism as regards negative theology. As we have seen above, for Middle Platonists, the supreme principle was, among other ways of describing it, the subject of ἀφαίρεσις, but despite all negative terms ascribed to it, the One belonged to the world of intellect and could be called a being. For Plotinus, as we will yet see in detail, the One stayed absolutely above intellect and being, and thus negative terms became of greatest importance to describe the principle which stayed totally beyond understanding. So, if Arius knew Plotinus, he would have encountered negative theology in a much-developed state. The answer to this question is complicated not only because of a small number of fragments from Arius' works which have survived, but also because of how little we know about philosophical schools in Alexandria in the later part of the 3rd century. As Henri-Irénée Marrou points out, there is a gap in our knowledge covering the period between the passing of Plotinus in

244–6 AD and the time of Synesius, Hypatia, and Hierocles.[148] Therefore, there is a problem whether the *Enneads* (written in Rome) were known and popular in Alexandria at the beginning of the 4th century. Although scholars generally agree that we can trace a Platonic background in fragments of Arius' works, the discussion continues whether it was Middle-Platonism or Neoplatonism of Plotinus.

It seems that for now the discussion on the philosophical background of Arius' theology shows that the influence is twofold. On one hand, Arius certainly was more reliable as regards philosophical and dialectical techniques than his critics.[149] On the other, his doctrine was not a product of a dialogue or great influence of Non-Christian Platonism. As G.C. Stead shows, scholars have cut corners when finding Platonic sources in Arius, because almost all concepts and terms that he uses had been already present in earlier Christian tradition, and he certainly could have conceived them himself as the one who reasserted the traditional Christian teaching.[150] Even if we agree that he could have seen his own teaching as a development of the Christian tradition, this does not mean that there is no philosophical background in it. Platonism is present in Arius' doctrine because it was already incorporated in Christian teaching, and negative theology followed suit. However, one main doubt still remains, namely whether Arius was influenced by Plotinus. On one hand, Rowan Williams claims that such influence can be confirmed, and on the other hand, he sees it within the topic of comprehensibility of God.[151] He argues not only for the influence of Plotinus, but also the influence of Neoplatonic philosophers who were

148 H.I. Marrou, *Synesius of Cyrene and Alexandrian Neo-Platonism*, in: *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. A. Momigliano, Oxford 1963, pp. 126–150.

149 C.G. Stead agrees at this point with the conclusions of P. Henry, *cf.* C.G. Stead, *The Platonism of Arius*, JTS, vol. XV, pt. 1, 1964, p. 16.

150 *Cf. ibid.*, pp. 19; 30. That also explains why other heterodox Christian writers of the first half of the 4th century did not perceive themselves as "Arians." In their eyes, they were also defenders of the core of Christian teaching. See, R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God. The Arian Controversy, 318–381*, Grand Rapids 2005, pp. 123–128.

151 R. Williams broadly argues philosophical sources of Arius in his work, *Arius Heresy and Tradition*, Grand Rapids 2002, pp. 181–234.

contemporary to Arius, such as Iamblichus and Porphyry.[152] But his claims were the subject of severe criticism by Christopher Stead, who claims that all points of influence underlined by Williams can be found already in Middle-Platonic texts and because of that there is no hard evidence that Arius knew Porphyry, Iamblichus, and even Plotinus.[153] Although he found no arguments to absolutely exclude the possibility of such influence and in a revised edition of his book, Williams only makes note of Steeds' criticism but does not accept it.[154] However, there is yet another strong confirmation of the influence of Plotinus on Arius. Raul Morltley confirms that the thought of Arius is well organized, so we can see it as a system, and this "Arius' system is much like that of Plotinus…"[155] So the question still remains unsolved, and cautious Williams' remarks describe it well when he says "we can catch a glimpse of Arius' metaphysics and cosmology."[156]

2.1.2 Monad and Dyad – the problem of creation

The central problem of entire Arianism is the understanding of creation, since the main claim is that the Logos was not eternally generated but created by the Father. Since the comprehension of this issue underlies specific understanding of the relationship between God and the Universe, it is also of utmost importance for the way the knowledge of God can be perceived. In his seminal article, H.A. Wolfson suggests that we can trace the origins of the Arian conflict in the interpretation of the beginning of the prologue to the Gospel of John (J: 1, 1–4). Those words were like an outline which from the time of Apologists began to be filled with interpretations by Christians. We have already seen a stage of this process in Clement of Alexandria, but those interpretations referred to Greek philosophy and especially Philo of

152 *Cf. ibid.*, pp. 31; 194; 225.
153 C.G. Steed finds four main arguments for Neoplatonic influence in Williams' book, and he repels them one by one. *Cf.* C. Stead, *Was Arius a Neoplatonist?*, in: *Doctrine and Philosophy in Early Christianity*, Burlington 2000, pp. 39–52.
154 *Cf.* R. Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 262–264.
155 R. Morley, *Alien God in Arius*, in: *Platonism in the Late Antiquity*, *op. cit.*, pp. 205; 215.
156 R. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

Alexandria.[157] The main outcome of this process is the understanding of the Logos as the ideal pattern of creation and the perfect mind whose thoughts are ideas. The Prologue also introduces the two stages of existence of the Logos: first – the existence with God the Father; second – the Logos that was with God is also God through whom all things were made. As Wolfson suggests, we can find a similar concept in Philo who wants to harmonize different statements of Plato by saying of ideas that they are eternal and simultaneously that they are created by God.[158] But the Fathers of the Church differed with Philo in two main points. Firstly, for them, the Logos was not created but generated, and secondly, the Logos was not only divine but was perceived as equal to God in divinity.

H.A. Wolfson points out that in the 2nd century, two interpretations of the status of the Logos existed simultaneously. For some Apologists, the Logos was eternal in the thought of God and then was generated, and hence was with God. Others claimed that at the beginning, before the creation of the Universe, the Logos came into being and was with God.[159] For H.A. Wolfson, it was Irenaeus and Origen who rejected this two-staged theory and claimed that the Logos was eternally generated by God. While Irenaeus made it in opposition to the Gnostics, Origen based his claims on purely philosophical grounds. Origen is more important here because his thought is a testimony of the transition from the Philonic to Plotinian interpretation of the Prologue.[160] At the beginning of the 4th century, both theories of generation of the Logos existed, and in both, the Logos was perceived as God, but this was changed by Arius, who gave a new meaning to the twofold-stage theory. H.A. Wolfson sees in Arius' opinions references to Philo's interpretation of creation, especially when he claims that at the beginning: "For God was alone, and the Word as yet was not, nor

157 *Cf*. H.A. Wolfson, *Philosophical Implications of Arianism and Apollinarianism*, DOP, vol. 12 (1958), p. 13. H.A. Wolfson sees the philosophy of Philo of Alexandria as the main reference which serves to understand the problem, and he presents Arius as influenced in his claims mainly by Philo.

158 *Ibid*., p. 14.

159 The second theory is based on the understanding of the term ἦν which could mean not "was" but rather "became" (ἐγένετο). Wolfson points out that in the Septuagint the term "to be" (εἶναι) also means "to become." *Ibid*., p. 14.

160 *Ibid*., p. 15.

the Wisdom."[161] Then the Logos was created as the means to create the Universe, and thus the Logos came to the second stage of existence. At the first stage, the Logos is described by Arius as "a property (ἰδίαν) coexistent with God,"[162] while in the second stage, it is described as "the Son." For A.H. Wolfson, such statements are similar to Philo's for whom the Logos is primarily a property of God and then becomes a separate being.[163] Therefore, Arius simply accepted the twofold-stage theory, which was not usually perceived as heterodox, but the problem lay in his interpretation of that theory. He claimed that the only sound conclusion is that the Logos came to existence "out of things that were not (ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων)",[164] and that meant that he was created by the Father *ex nihilo*. We shall come back to this important expression, but it is worth mentioning that in the eyes of A.H. Wolfson, Arius had two main religious reasons to make such a claim. Firstly, he wanted to preserve monotheism and the perception of God as the one, which was to be destroyed by Orthodox statements on three hypostases. Secondly, he defended the understanding of God as the Creator and not merely the craftsmen of the Universe. With respect to both, Arius can be perceived as the one who returns to the Old Testament and the Philonic conception of God. Wolfson concludes that from the philosophical point of view, Arius presented the anti-mythological Platonico-Aristotelian position and his opponents based their opinions on the Stoico-Neoplatonic rationalization of mythology.[165] Although such conclusion based on Arius'

161 *Orat. cont. Arian.* I, 5. μόνος ὁ Θεὸς, καὶ οὔπω ἦν ὁ Λόγος καὶ ἡ σοφία (Bright, p. 5; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 308).

162 *Ibid.* I, 5. Δύο γοῦν σοφίας.᾽εἶναι, μίαν μὲν τῆν ἰδίαν καὶ συνυπάρχουσαν τῷ Θεῷ (Bright, p. 5; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 309).

163 A.H. Wolfson, *op. cit.*, p. 16. Wolfson sees other similarities between Philo and Arius in naming the Logos as "a co-worker" (συνεργός) of God in making the Universe.

164 *Orat. cont. Arian.* I, 5 (Bright, p. 5; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 309).

165 A.H. Wolfson, *op. cit.*, pp. 19–20. It seems that Wolfson's conclusions are too general, and he is also wrong in interpreting the Orthodox position as claiming that God was perceived as "consisting of three inseparable substances, called hypostases or persons." (p. 19). Such an understanding of the Orthodox view would certainly lead to a conclusion that it endangered the unity of God, but it is sufficient to claim that there is one substance and three hypostases to undermine Wolfson's argumentation.

possible intentions seems to me pure speculation, Wolfson is right in pointing out the philosophical background of the entire controversy and the importance of ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων.

Wolfson's understanding of Arius was criticized by G.C. Stead, who agrees that he accepted the two-stage theory of the generation of the Logos, but only in a certain sense. However, looking for the philosophical background of Arius in his article, G.C. Stead agrees that it was undoubtedly Platonism.[166] He points out the beginning of Arius' letter to Alexander, which contains an unprecedented cumulation of the term μονάς,[167] which has its Platonic background, but can also be referred to Philo, and moreover it was already present in theological literature since it had also been used by Clement and Origen.[168] This term was so important for Arius because it stressed the divine simplicity as a bare unity without any distinctions, and it also allowed him to argue that the Trinity cannot be understood as a kind of any distinctions within the being of God, but the Son and the Spirit must be conceived as separate and subordinate created beings.[169] The Platonic background of the understanding of God as an indivisible monad would be even greater if we could read the fragment of *Thalia*, in which Arius seems to apply the term δυάς to the Logos, as the evocation of the Middle-Platonic Second Principle. This line reads: "Understand that the Monad [always] was; but the Dyad was not, before it was in existence."[170] Christopher Stead once again questions Neoplatonic references so strongly claimed by Rowan Williams[171] and shows that it could simply mean "the Second" or

---

166 C.G. Stead, *The Platonism of Arius*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
167 *De Synodis* 16, 2, 3–4. μόνον ἀγέννητον, μόνον ἀίδιον, μόνον ἄναρχον, μόνον ἀληθινόν, μόνον ἀθανασίαν ἔχοντα, μόνον σοφόν, μόνον ἀγαθόν, μόνον δυνάστην, πάντων κριτήν, διοικητήν, οἰκονόμον, ἄτρεπτον καὶ ἀναλλοίωτον, δίκαιον καὶ ἀγαθόν (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 243).
168 C.G. Stead, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
169 *Cf. ibid.*, pp. 18–19.
170 *De Synodis* 15, 3, 28. σύνες ὅτι ἡ μονὰς ἦν, ἡ δυὰς δὲ οὐκ ἦν, πρὶν ὑπάρξῃ (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 243; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 457).
171 Rowan Williams does not think that Stead's arguments on "uncomplimentary" understanding of δυάς forced him to change his conclusions. He underlines that it is not necessary to translate δυάς as Second God and says: "I am not sure that we need to resort to this explanation" (R. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 191).

"Twofold", and most of all "in Platonic circles duality implies imperfection, matter, the world of senses, the left hand, the female principle." Nevertheless, he also finds some uses of δυάς in Philo and Chaldean Oracles,[172] so references to Middle-Platonic principles seem plausible. Moreover, along this line, we have the Dyad contrasted with the Monad and that opens up the interpretation that Arius understood the relationship between the Father and the Logos in the Platonic fashion. So δυάς could be read as a being which is inferior to μονάς, that is the Father. The act of creation is then seen by Arius as the emergence of the plurality from the unity, and this is consistent with the general theological claim that the Logos is a creation. The main borderline between the Creator and the creation runs between the unity and the plurality, since the Logos cannot be called the Monad like the Father: it must belong to the created reality. If we interpret this in the Neoplatonic fashion, we can resolve Stead's objection as to the Dyad being related to matter and imperfection, because Plotinus also claimed that intellectual matter existed as the cause of differentiation of ideas.[173] For Plotinus, intellectual matter is so important because it also allows for arguing the passivity of the second principle which is not in itself the active principle of multiplication. Moreover, for Plotinus, the Dyad is the first product of the process which comes from the One but is indefinite until it turns back to the Source in contemplation. Only then it becomes the Intellect and differentiates itself from the One.[174] Once again, at every moment of the process, the Intellect is shaped and acted upon by the One itself. As Rowan Williams notes, the Neoplatonic understanding of first principle serves well Arius' purpose because it is a "sharp rejection of 'correlativity' of Father and Son."[175] As we will see below, such a view is also consistent with negative theology of Arius, because like the One, God the Father as μονάς must remain unknown and is best described in negative terms.

There is yet another mode of expressing the difference between the Father and the Son which was used by Arius. He was one of the first who stressed the understanding of the act of the creation of the Son as the act

172 C.G. Stead, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
173 *Cf*. R. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 192.
174 Plotinus, *Enn.* V, 1, 5 V, 4, 2 (Henry/Schwyzer, vol. 2, pp. 191–192; 235–238).
175 R. Williams, *op. cit.* p. 196.

of God's will. Although there are many aspects of the Arian teaching which will develop or even disappear in the second half of the 4th century, the problem of the will of the Father constantly reappears in the Neo-Arian teaching and almost all successors of Arius claim that God created the Son out of His will and wish (βούλημα καί θέλημα).[176] Arius' understanding of the generation of the Son as the act of will is proclaimed many times in the preserved fragments,[177] and this statement can be explained by reference to Plato's *Timaeus*, where he says that lesser gods have been brought into being (γεγένησθε) and will be preserved by divine will (βουλήσεως).[178] This fragment was of great importance in the debate on the eternity of the cosmos, and was rejected by the philosophers who shared the Aristotelian view of its eternity.[179] This passage, however, was used by Christian writers to describe the generation of the Logos for the works of creation. We see such teaching in Philo and also in Christian Apologists, but Origen, who faced the gnostic doctrines, admits it more guardedly.[180] Such a notion was certainly unacceptable for his critics and most of all Arius, who, by underlining the importance of God's will, tried to show a partition between the Father and the Son. Consequently, for him, the act of creation is perceived as more arbitrary. There can be nothing that would restrain God in His act of creation – it must be perceived as absolutely free. Such a notion psychologizes the act of creation and, as R. Mortley notes, it simply makes the gap between the Father and the Son even greater, since this act is perceived as "a matter of psychological autonomy, and not of nature."[181]

How, then, did Arius understand the universe? Although, as we have seen, we can find many references to philosophical sources in the doctrine

---

176 We can see such a strong emphasis of God's will in Arius, Astorius, and Eusebius of Nicomedia (R. Morley, *Alien God in Arius*, *op. cit.*, p. 214). We shall also see that this topic is of utmost importance to Eunomius.

177 *Cf.* e.g., *De Synodis* 16, 2, 8 (Opitz, vol. 2, pp. 243; 33; NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 458) ὑποστήσαντα ἰδίῳ θελήματι ἄτρεπτον ("He made Him subsist at His own will"); *Epistula ad episcopos Aegipti at Libyae* 12. ότε γὰρ γέγονεν, ὅτε βεβούληται αὐτὸν ὁ Θεὸς δημιουργῆσαι· (PG 25, 564 B). "For He has then originated when God has chosen to produce Him" (tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 229).

178 *Tim.*, 41 A-B.

179 *Cf.* G.C. Stead, *The Platonism of Arius, op. cit.*, p. 27.

180 *Cf. ibid.* p. 28.

181 R. Mortley, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

of Arius, they no longer seem to position the universe in the Platonic way as divided into a sensual and a noetic realm.[182] We observe here a very important shift in perspective, from the Greek to the Christian worldview, and the dividing line now is drawn between the Creator and the creation. This results in a dualistic vision of the Universe, which is shared by Arius and Athanasius. The borderline between the Creator and the creation lies in a different place is both cases, but this does not change the fact that it was evidently a dualistic worldview.[183]

2.1.3 Creation *ex nihilo*? The problem of a "non-being"

Another issue which arises when one is studying the fragment of Arius' doctrine of Creation which could be referred to philosophical sources and has an influence on negative speaking of God is the question of *creatio ex nihilo*. Athanasius starts his summary of the claims put forth by Arius with the sentence: "Arius and those with him thought and professed thus: 'God made the Son out of nothing and called Him His Son'."[184] Although this claim was understood by almost all scholars as the statement that the Son was created *ex nihilo*, G.C. Stead put those opinions in doubt. He noted that the expression "ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων" alone is not enough to understand Arius' doctrine in such a way. The term τὰ οὐκ ὄντα does not necessarily mean non-being in a sense that something does not exist,[185] but can mean

---

182 H. A. Wolfson suggests that it was an Orthodox Father who first dispelled the Platonic view of the universe while Arians still understood it as divided into noetic and sensual, but this opinion seems false. See H.A. Wolfson, *Philosophical Implications…, op. cit.*, p. 7.

183 Commenting on dualism of both sides of the discussion, Stead says: "Arius' divergence from Alexander and Athanasius may be indicated as follows; the latter are prepared to do violence to their philosophic a dualism in order to establish a position for the Son which is theologically and devotionally adequate. Arius does his best (at least initially) to establish such a position while keeping his basic dualism intact." G.C. Stead, *Platonism of Arius*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

184 *De Synodis* 15, 1, 1–2. Ἄρειος καὶ οἱ σὺν αὐτῷ φρονήσαντες καὶ λέγοντες 'ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων πεποίηκε τὸν υἱὸν ὁ θεὸς καὶ κέκληκεν ἑαυτῷ υἱόν (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 242); *Cf. Orat. cont. Arian.* I, 9, (Bright, p. 9).

185 *Cf.* C.G. Stead, *The Word "From Nothing"*, in: *Doctrine and Philosophy in Early Christianity*, Burlington 2000, pp. 679–680.

that it is indeterminate, bad, or "anything which is distinguishable from ὁ ὤν, the One ultimate reality."[186] It seems that both Arius and Athanasius understood this expression as the description of a change, since any *x* must change from something which is non-*x*. For G.C. Stead, this expression is then a strong divergence from Origen, who understood God as related not only to the Son but also to the world on principle, and, therefore, claiming that the Logos was made by the Father from "non-being" could be a criticism of Alexander's Origenistic doctrine.[187] Going further down in the consideration of what this expression of Arius would really mean, we can say that the Logos pre-existed in the thought of God and then he was generated. Arius wanted to express that using the Aristotelian terminology.[188] Such an understanding is certainly based on the philosophical meaning of "non-being," but I doubt that it can be applied here in such a manner. Nevertheless, even if we reject it, the main purpose of the use of ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων is still plausible. It was a very strong claim of the transcendence of the Father who stays unrelated to all creations, even the Son. Since the creations can be called "beings," the Creator in this sense must be totally different and thus He must be described as "non-being"; so, because of His remoteness from the world, He can be properly described only in negative terms.

The interpretation proposed by G.C. Stead can be undermined when we turn to one of the most philosophizing late opponent of Arius – Marius Victorinus. In his eyes, it is necessary to refute the claim that the Logos was made by God ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων, because it means that the Son was generated *de nihilo*.[189] But Victorinus also feels compelled to clarify fully the meaning of "non-being"; therefore, he defines four types of non-being. He does it in reply to a probably imagined character who defends the Arian position – Candidus,[190] and the consideration of the meaning of "non-being" is the main part of his letter. Victorinus explains that there is:

---

186 G.C. Stead, *The Platonism of Arius…*, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
187 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
188 G.C. Stead, *The Word "From Nothing"*, *op. cit.* p. 681.
189 *Adv. Ar.* 2, 10, 34–36. "Hinc ergo exlcusus Arius, qui protulit ἦν ὅτε οὐκ ἦν. Sententia eius fuit et illa ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων esse filium id est de nihilo" (SC 68, p. 424).
190 Since we know that Candidus is a fictitious character (*cf.* P. Nautin, *Candidus l'Arien, in L'Homme devant Dieu*, *Mélanges offerts au H. de Lubac*, t. 1, Paris

> "[non-being] according to negation, so that absolutely and in all ways there is the privation of existence; according to difference from another nature; according to 'to be' which is not yet but which can be and will be; according to 'to be' which is above all existents."[191]

We shall come back to a more extensive explanation of the meaning of those four types, but for now let us note that among them only one (non-being according to negation) describes something which simply does not exist. Speaking on God the Father, Victorinus says that He is both a "non-being" (τὸ μὴ ὄν) and a "being" (ὂν). He is a being because He is the Father of a being, and because the cause must be superior to its effect, He is also a non-being.[192] Therefore, He must be named a non-being "according to 'to be' which is above all existents," and the best way to describe the Father is the term a "total pre-being" (*totum* προόν).[193] For Marius Victorinus, the difference between the Father and the Son is then described by a distinction between non-being and being, but unlike Arius, he does not view this distinction as discontinuation but it seems to be rather the best explanation of the relationship between persons which dwells inside the substance of God. Therefore, the Logos is described as a first being and is called an "absolutely perfect being" (*omnimodis perfectum ὂν*), which was generated eternally by the Father.[194] Finally, he says that we can also call the Father by the name of *Logos*, "but Logos [is] silent and repose (*silens et requiescens*)"; therefore, it is better to say that "the Logos is unbegotten rather than made from nonexistent."[195] Marius Victorinus admits then that the Son can be

---

1964, pp. 309; 317), we may ascribe the conviction of the importance of the explanation how to understand the Logos made from non-being to Victorinus.

191 *Ad Cand.* 4, 1–5. "Quod quidem intellegitur et vocatur quattuor modis: iuxta negationem, omnino omnimodis ut privatio sit existentis, iuxta alterius ad aliud naturam, iuxta nondum esse, quod futurum est et potest esse, iuxta quod ominia que sunt, est esse" (SC 68, p. 136; tr. Clark, pp. 63–64).

192 *Ad Cand.* 4, 5–10 (SC 68, p. 136).

193 *Ad Cand.* 2, 28 (SC 68, p. 134; tr. Clark, p. 62).

194 *Ad Cand.* 15, 3 (SC 68, p. 134; tr. Clark, p. 72).

195 *Ad Cand.* 17, 11–15. "Propterea deus et λόγος, quoniam circa deum et in principio fuit, sicuti et deus non genitus est λόγος, cum deus ipse λόγος sit, sed silens et requiescens λόγος. Ut videas necessitatem cognoscendi multo magis non genitum esse λόγον quam ipsum fieri ex his quae non sunt" (SC 68, pp. 154–156; tr. Clark, p. 74).

called the one generated from non-being, but this non-being must not be understood as something which does not exist. He sees the philosophical background of the expression ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων, but simultaneously claims that Arius completely misunderstood it. Therefore, if G.C. Stead's interpretation is correct, it would mean that Marius Victorinus misinterpreted this expression in Arius.

But there is yet another thing which for Victorinus is the effect of calling the Father a "non-being." He completely agrees with Arius that this is a basis of negative theology, which must be applied to the Father. Because he is above every ὂν, he is also above all knowledge (*supra omnem cognoscentiam*).[196] We shall see a more detailed analysis of negative theology of Marius Victorinus further on in this chapter, but here it has to be mentioned that he seems to have believed that such application of negative theology may be reconciled with the Orthodox view. It is then possible to apply negative terms to the Father, and at the same time, it may be claimed that the Logos is the object of positive knowledge, and such an expression does not destroy consubstantiality of the divine persons.

2.1.4 The attributes of God from Arius' perspective

Arian claims regarding the transcendence of God also had a profound impact on the teaching on his attributes. Since God the Father is perceived as a *monad*, he is most of all simple and cannot be divided in any way. It is the Logos which may be perceived as the principle of multiplicity. Since the Son is a first creation, He also must be different in the aspect of having attributes which were perceived as naturally ascribable to God's essence. The fragment of the Proverbs 8:22 was in this case the most problematic one. It is the only place in the Holy Scripture where the Wisdom of God says of itself: "The Lord created me at the beginning of His way for His works." (κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ).[197] Arius and

196 *Ad Cand.* 13, 8. (SC 68, p. 148).

197 This fragment may be understood in this way only in the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew text. Other translations were proposed by Orthodox writers. Since at the time another version of the text existed, refutation of the Arian understanding of this passage may be made solely on the philological ground, *cf.* T. Stępień, *Created or Uncreated Wisdom? Arguments on Christ*

his successors interpreted this fragment by identifying the Wisdom with the Son and the Logos, and therefore He may be also understood as having been created. Since it is the only sentence in the Scripture which calls the Son by the name of creation, Arius cannot omit the problem of the manner in which we can call the Son of God the Wisdom.[198] To sustain his claims, he must explain that the Wisdom which is the Son is different from the one that that Father has as an attribute of his own nature: "Accordingly, he says that there are two wisdoms: first, the attribute coexistent with God, and next, that in this wisdom the Son was originated, and was only named Wisdom and Word as partaking of it. 'For Wisdom,' saith he, 'by the will of the wise God, had its existence in Wisdom.'"[199] Here we see a division and, to some extent – a connection between the wisdoms of the Father and the Son, but there are two Wisdoms of God, not one. However, there is a problem of the meaning of the Wisdom of the Father, which is not simply an attribute (ἰδίων) but rather a "coexistent attribute" (τὴν ἰδίαν καὶ συνυπάρχουσαν τῷ Θεῷ). It seems that on one hand Arius wanted to put emphasis on two wisdoms, but on the other, he also wanted the simplicity of God to remain intact, and thus he calls wisdom a "coexistent attribute." But this results in a rather odd conception of an attribute of God being somehow different from God's essence. It seems that such claims had its earlier formulation in the Alexandrian tradition, but Arius goes much further in the understanding of the Son as the one who only participates in the attributes of the Father,[200] and only thanks to that participation can be called God.[201] The attributes of

as the Wisdom of God in the Polemic of Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa against Eunomius, in: *Sophia. the Wisdom of God*, ed. Th. Hainthaler, F. Mali, G. Emmenegger, M.L. Ostermann, Insbruck, Wien 2017, pp. 147–155.

198 G.C. Stead notes that Arius too much relied on this fragment, and this made him vulnerable to the arguments of his critics, C.G. Stead, *The Word 'From Nothing'* in: *Doctrine and Philosophy in Early Christianity*, *op. cit.*, p. 683.

199 *Orat. con. Arian.* I, 5. Δύο γοῦν σοφίας φησὶν εἶναι, μίαν μὲν τὴν ἰδίαν καὶ συνυπάρχουσαν τῷ Θεῷ, τὸν δὲ Υἱὸν ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ σοφίᾳ γεγενῆσθαι, καὶ ταύτης μετέχοντα ὠνομάσθαι μόνον Σοφίαν καὶ Λόγον. Ἡ Σοφία γὰρ, φησὶ, τῇ σοφίᾳ ὑπῆρξε σοφοῦ Θεοῦ θελήσει (Bright, p. 5; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 309).

200 *Cf.* C.G. Stead, *Platonism of Arius*, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

201 *Orat. con. Arian.* I, 9; καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀληθινὸς Θεὸς ὁ Χριστός, ἀλλὰ μετοχῇ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐθεοποιήθη· (Bright, p. 9). "Christ is not very God, but He, as others, was made God by participation" (tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 311).

the Son are parallel to the Father, but they are generated. Similarly, we can call him the name of Wisdom, Logos, and Power only because all of them were given to him by the grace of God.[202] Therefore, the Father gives to the Son what he possesses in his own nature upon with the first act of creation. C.G. Stead proposes to understand this as a "two-level theory" in which God the Father simply has wisdom, power, etc., while the Son, being the perfect creature, learns wisdom. This also means that the ingenerated Logos as well as all attributes are possessed by the Father in his indistinguishable unity, while in the Son as the first creation those attributes differ and are obtained not possessed as such.[203]

Despite all of the uncertainty of such reconstruction of Arius' teaching on the attributes of God, we can see that it is plausible in the context of other parts of his teaching. As regards the Wisdom of God as well as other attributes, Arius wants to secure the transcendent position of the Father by saying that His attributes are completely different from those which are possessed by the Son. Therefore, even if we can know the Wisdom which the Son is, we cannot have a proper knowledge of the Wisdom of the Father. It could be only the cognition based on the participation of the Son's multiple names and attributes in the true attributes of the simple, remote, and transcendent God.

2.1.5 Negative theology of Arius

Since it expresses rather the lack of knowledge, negative language seems to be the best choice to speak about the Father who alone is the Creator of the Universe and is utterly transcendent. In the preserved fragments of Arius' works, we find a very frequent use of negative terms, especially in the longest preserved fragment of *Thalia*. This text, quoted by Athanasius, begins as follows: "God Himself then, in His own nature, is ineffable by

---

202 *Orat. con. Arian.* I, 9 (Bright, p. 9).

203 G.C. Stead refers here to the "to the level theory" proposed by A.H. Wolfson, saying that such theory can be plausible only in case of the attributes of God without speaking of the generation of the Logos as such. *Cf.* C.G. Stead, *Platonism of Arius*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

all men."[204] How, then, can we even speak about such ineffable God? The following verses show the mode of speaking about the Father; namely, that we can do it only because we know the Son of God:

> "And Ingenerate we call Him, because of Him who is generate by nature.
> We praise Him as without beginning because of Him who has a beginning.
> And adore Him as everlasting, because of Him who in time has come to be."[205]

Such a mode of speaking is obviously a negative one, and we can apply one term to the Father because he is not of what we know about the Logos. Robert Mortley suggests that this implies a kind of a relationship between the Father and the Son. He underlines the causal meaning of "because" (διὰ), which is of utmost importance especially in the first verse of this fragment.[206] We find many philosophical references to this phrase, which go back to *Phedrus* of Plato, where he speaks of the ungenerated principle, which is the source of any motion.[207] Mortley also suggests, referring to Plotinus, that there is a clear link between the ἀρχὴ and the ἀγένητον in Platonic literature.[208] This similarity is important because here unbegotten is used as a negation of begotten. Therefore, we observe the use of negative theology, which is similar to Medioplatonic *aphairesis*. We cannot have a

---

204 *De Synodis* 15, 3, 9. Αὐτὸς γοῦν ὁ θεὸς καθό ἐστιν ἄρρητος ἅπασιν ὑπάρχει (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 242; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 457).

205 *De Synodis* 15, 3, 13–16: ἀγέννητον δὲ αὐτόν φαμεν διὰ τὸν τὴν φύσιν γεννητόν·τοῦτον ἄναρχον ἀνυμνοῦμεν διὰ τὸν ἀρχὴν ἔχοντα, ἀίδιον δὲ αὐτὸν σέβομεν διὰ τὸν ἐν χρόνοις γεγαότα (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 242; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 457).

206 *Cf.* R. Morley, *Alien God in Arius*, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

207 *Phaed.* 245 C-E. "Now, a source is ungenerated, because everything that is generated is necessarily generated from a source, but there is nothing for a source to be generated from. For if a source were generated from anything, it would stop being a source. Since a source is ungenerated, it is also necessarily imperishable, because a defunct source can never be generated from anything else nor can it bring about generation in anything else, given that everything is generated from a source. And so it is a self-mover that is a source of motion, and a self-mover can neither perish nor be generated, or else the entire universe and the whole of e creation will inevitably run down and stop, and will never again find anything to act as a source of motion and generation" (tr. R. Waterfield, pp. 27–28).

208 *Cf.* Plotinus *Enn.* V, 4, 1, 18; (Henry/Schwyzer, vol. 2, p. 234) II, 4, 5, 26 (vol. 1, p. 169); R. Mortley, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

clear concept of the source, so we must negate our conceptions by cutting off what we know of a lesser being. There is one more reference to Plotinus here, because he also underlines that we can be taught by such negations.[209] But we must also admit that the use of negative theology in the case of Arius is different. Discussing the way of predication on the Good, Plotinus underlines that we must obtain some knowledge of the Good before we can look and thus: "We come to this learning by analogies, by abstractions (ἀναλογίαι τε καὶ ἀφαιρέσεις), by our understanding of its subsequents, of all what is derived from the Good, by the upward steps towards it."[210] To obtain this knowledge, our negative terms must necessarily contain some positive knowledge,[211] and thus the outcome of this knowledge seems to be uncertain as something between the positive and the negative. R. Mortley suggests that the use of negative theology by Arius is different because it seems to be a "watertight logical argument" like a logical demonstration which resembles rather the negative method of Proclus.[212] The goal of Arius here seems to lay in showing the total incognoscibility of the Father and a way to achieve the goal of separating the Father from the Son. So the use of negative theology is very important in the argumentation and serves to show inferiority of the Son. The Logos must not be equal to the Father since we can know, understand, and have a conception of the Son, while we cannot have any positive knowledge about the Father. Therefore, the Son must be a created being because our created intellects can conceive him.

For Arius, then, God the Father is not only incomprehensible, but is completely alien not only to our knowledge, but also to the Son. Robert Mortley points out in his seminal article the importance of Arius' frequently calling God the Father "alien God" (ξένος). In Athanasius' account, we read that "alien is the Son to the Father according to essence,"[213] and

209 *Cf.* R. Mortley, *op. cit.*, p. 210.
210 *Enn.* VI, 7, 36 (Henry/Schwyzer, vol. 3, pp. 229–230).
211 *Enn.* VI, 7, 38 (Henry/Schwyzer, vol. 3, p. 232).
212 *Cf.* R. Morley, *op. cit.,* p. 210.
213 *De synodis* 15, 3, 20. ξένος τοῦ υἱοῦ κατ' οὐσίαν ὁ πατήρ, ὅτι ἄναρχος ὑπάρχει (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 242); *Cf. Or. con. Arian.* I, 6. Καὶ πάντων ξένων καὶ ἀνομοίων ὄντων τοῦ Θεοῦ κατ' οὐσίαν, οὕτω καὶ ὁ Λόγος ἀλλότριος μὲν καὶ ἀνόμοιος κατὰ πάντα τῆς τοῦ Πατρὸς οὐσίας καὶ ἰδιότητός ἐστι· τῶν δὲ γενητῶν καὶ κτισμάτων ἴδιος καὶ εἷς αὐτῶν τυγχάνει (Bright, p. 6). "And, whereas all beings are foreign

in another fragment, where Alexander sums up Arian teaching, we have an even stronger confirmation that the Logos is "foreign, alien from, and separated from the essence of God."[214] Such a peculiar vocabulary and radical statements caught the attention of Athanasius and provoked strong opposition, as the claim of total difference between the Father and the Son. Mortley says that although the term ξένος was almost non-existent in Platonic literature, we can trace many references to the second term used by Arius – ἀλλότριος. It was present in the negative vocabulary of Middle-Platonism, Valentinian Gnosticism, and once again we can find it in Plotinus. This word is used very often and is "a specific characteristic of his language," especially in his rejection of the Gnostics.[215] While the latter, according to Plotinus, confessed total difference and discontinuity between the intellectual and the material world, he wants to argue rather for continuity between them. There must be some link between the Soul and the material universe because the sensual reality is built by a rational design, and it must somehow correspond to the maker.[216] Here, we have not only the confirmation of possible references to the philosophical vocabulary, but also we can see that for Arius, those terms serve the same purpose – to show the lack of continuity between the Father and the Son, between the first creation and the Creator,[217] and this gap can be best described in negative terms. A radical difference between the Father and the Logos is also expressed by Arius in his claims on the knowledge that the Son has of the Father:

and different from God in essence, so too is 'the Word alien and unlike in all things to the Father's essence and propriety,' but belongs to things originated and created, and is one of these" (tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 309).

214 *De decretis Niceane synodi* 6, 1, 4–5. ξένος τε καὶ ἀλλότριος καὶ ἀπεσχοινισμένος ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ οὐσίας; (Opitz, vol. 2, p, 5; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 70).

215 R. Mortley, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

216 *Enn.* II, 9, 11–12 (Henry/Schwyzer, vol. 1, pp. 219–221).

217 R. Mortley claims that such a view would certainly seem strange for Plotinus. "We can assert, then, that the separation between Father and Son envisaged by Arius would have been a disturbing otherness for Plotinus. He would concede no doubt that such a degree of otherness could exist, but would regret it, and probably consider it to constitute a separation only between principles which are very distant from each other" *op. cit.*, p. 208.

> To speak in brief, God is ineffable to His Son.
> For He is to Himself what He is, that is, unspeakable.
> So that nothing which is called comprehensible does the Son know to speak about;
> for it is impossible for Him to investigate the Father, who is by Himself.
> For the Son does not know His own essence,
> For, being Son, He really existed, at the will of the Father.
> What argument then allows, that He who is from the Father
> should know His own parent by comprehension?
> For it is plain that for that which hath a beginning to conceive how the Unbegun is,
> or to grasp the idea, is not possible.[218]

The Son cannot see the Father and cannot comprehend him, and cannot have a clear conception not only of the essence of the Father, but also of his own essence.[219] Such is for Arius the effect of putting a borderline between the Creator and the creation, between those two persons. It is significant that in this text, the conception that the Son does not have the knowledge is expressed by the term καταλήψις, which has obvious Stoic reference. As related by Stobaeus, the main Stoic definition of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) was expressed as "a cognition (καταλήψις) that is secure and unshakable by reason."[220] The main criteria which cognition must fulfil to be knowledge is to be sure and secure, which is possible when the object was grasped

218 *De synodis* 15, 3, 34–43. συνελόντι εἰπεῖν τῷ υἱῷ ὁ θεὸς ἄρρητος ὑπάρχει·
ἔστι γὰρ ἑαυτῷ ὅ ἐστι τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἄλεκτος,
ὥστε οὐδὲν τῶν λεγομένων κατά τε κατάληψιν συνίει ἐξειπεῖν ὁ υἱός.
ἀδύνατα γὰρ αὐτῷ τὸν πατέρα τε ἐξιχνιάσει, ὅς ἐστιν ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ.
αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ υἱὸς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ οὐσίαν οὐκ οἶδεν,
υἱὸς γὰρ ὢν θελήσει πατρὸς ὑπῆρξεν ἀληθῶς.
τίς γοῦν λόγος συγχωρεῖ τὸν ἐκ πατρὸς ὄντα
αὐτὸν τὸν γεννήσαντα γνῶναι ἐν καταλήψει;
δῆλον γὰρ ὅτι τὸ ἀρχὴν ἔχον, τὸν ἄναρχον, ὡς ἔστιν,
ἐμπερινοῆσαι ἢ ἐμπεριδράξασθαι οὐχ οἷόν τέ ἐστιν; (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 243; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 458).

219 It seems that the claim of incomprehensibility of the Father not only to men but also to the Logos was common among Arians, *cf.* D.M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians. The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the 'Arian Controversy'*, Oxford 2007, p. 204.

220 Stobaeus, *Ant.* II, 7, 5l. εἶναι δὲ τὴν ἐπιστήμην κατάληψιν ἀσφαλῆ καὶ ἀμετάπτωτον ὑπὸ λόγου· (Wachsmuth/Hense, pp. 73; 19–21).

firmly by reason.[221] Arius uses this term to confirm that the Son cannot have the grasp of the essence of the Father and even of his own essence. As Williams notes, it is a puzzle to scholars what was the origin of Arius' claim of the Son's ignorance of his own οὐσία, and he proposes that the most probable point of reference is Plotinus, who provided the conceptual framework to such claim.[222] But there is still a possibility of the vision of the Father, and the lack of knowledge is not complete. In another fragment of *Thalia*, Arius claims: "I will say it expressly, how by the Son is seen the Invisible; by that power by which God sees, and in His own measure, the Son endures to see the Father, as is lawful."[223] So a kind of vision is possible, but it is limited; we find here another similarity to *Enneads*, where Plotinus describes how the Intellect sees the One.[224] Arius and Plotinus use a similar language here, and the vision of the One is also possible according to the power (δύναμις) of the One, not the Intellect itself. Although some scholars understood that fragment according to the well-known doctrine that God is known thanks to His "powers," Williams disagrees with that and claims that the knowledge of the Intellect primarily concerns the Intellect itself and that it comes from the One: "Thus the activity of nous, its knowing of itself and of the One, depends on the One's capacity; it is 'according to the One's dunamis.'"[225] However, it is impossible for the Intellect to see the One because the knowledge of the One is identical with its being. That is why going forward in the grasping of the One means getting closer to the Supreme Principle. That is similar to what Arius says about the knowledge of the Son, who sees the Father according to the δύναμις of the Father's own self-perception, and while this perception is simple, the knowledge of the Logos is a "multiple and determinate image of the Father's simple vision."[226] This view seems to be consistent with what has previously been

221 *Cf.* R. Brouwer, *The Early Stoic on Wisdom, Sagehood and Socrates*, Cambridge 2014, pp. 30–32.
222 *Cf.* R. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 209.
223 *De synodis* 15, 3, 14–15. ῥητῶς δὲ λέξω, πῶς τῷ υἱῷ ὁρᾶται ὁ ἀόρατος· τῇ δυνάμει ᾗ δύναται ὁ θεὸς ἰδεῖν· ἰδίοις τε μέτροις (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 242; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 457).
224 *Cf. Enn.* V, 3, 7 (Henry/Schwyzer, vol. 2, pp. 215–216).
225 R. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 211.
226 *Ibid.*, p. 212.

said about the distinction of *monad* and *dyad*. As the first creation, the Son is the principle of multiplicity since He contains paradigms of all creations. Moreover, Arius seems to be quite sure what the simplicity of God means. It can be seen especially in the letter to Alexander. As we have seen above, he started this letter with a very frequent use of the term μονάς applied to many titles of God. He confesses that God is:

> "alone Ingenerate, alone Everlasting, alone Unbegun, alone True, alone having Immortality, alone Wise, alone Good, alone Sovereign; Judge, Governor, and Providence of all, unalterable and unchangeable…"[227]

This term is used not only to show that any perception of God must be simple (μόνον), but it seems to be also the principle of Arius' negative theology. Having refuted multiple opinions of Valentinus, Manichaeus, Sabellius, and Hieracas, he summarizes his teaching by pointing out that those opinions would have put in doubt the simplicity of God, while He: "is before all things as being Monad and Beginning of all."[228] Therefore, he is convinced that simplicity is the attribute which cannot be refuted, and we can ascribe it to God with certainty – God can be called by many names, but all of them are descriptions of his simplicity, and this is the rule which allows to disprove any other opinion which is contrary to it. We could even say that negative theology drove Arius too far, and we (and even the Logos) cannot know God, but simultaneously we know how to understand His simplicity.

The problem of the Son's knowledge of the Father was one of the most important issues in the 4th-century theology, and "Arius' opponents rightly treated his views in this area as crucial."[229] For the Orthodox, Arius' claims seemed to deny any knowledge that the Son had about the essence of the Father, which for them had a profound soteriological effect. It contradicted the role of the Son as the revealer of the Father, and since the Son does not know his own οὐσία, even the role of the Logos as the paradigm of creation is also put in doubt.[230] It is, then, evident why the Orthodox writers opposed such views with strong claims that since the essence of the Father

227 *De Synodis* 16, 2, 3–4 (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 243).
228 *De Synodis* 16, 4, 8. ἀλλ' ὡς μονὰς καὶ ἀρχὴ πάντων, οὕτως ὁ θεὸς πρὸ πάντων ἐστί (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 243; tr. NPNF, s. 2, vol. 4, p. 458).
229 R. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 209.
230 *Cf.* R. Mortley, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

was wholly communicated to the Son, He must have had a full and perfect knowledge of the Father which no creature can possess.[231]

Finally, we must conclude that the similarities between Arius' and Plotinus' systems and modes of expression do not evidently confirm that he knew the *Enneads*. In my opinion, for Arius, the emphasizing of negative theology seems very useful in his demonstration of the differences between the Father and the Logos. Moreover, he could be convinced that such a strong emphasis on negative theology is aligned with the earlier tradition of Clement of Alexandria and even Origen. Therefore, we can say that it was a natural development of the Middle-Platonic negative language, which was certainly known to Arius since it was already incorporated in the Christian doctrine. However, some fragments of Arius' writings strongly suggest that negative theology was very important to him and even was used as a tool to support his clams of the inferiority of the Son. This is quite contrary to what we will see in the case of Eunomius.

2.2 The transcendence and knowledge of God in Athanasius

One of the most important consequences of Arius' theology was the view of God who is distinct and remote to all creation. Such discontinuity was something new, especially to Greek thinkers who, while claiming the need of negative theology, at the same time put a stress on continuation which must exist between the First Principle and its effects. However, this was also an idea that was in a sense new to Christian thinkers and could be perceived as drawing all conclusions from the Biblical doctrine of creation, which in Arius' opinion supported the inferiority of the Son of God. Orthodox writers saw his claims of the creation of the Son from non-being as producing the first being from nothingness. Although they disagreed that the Son was created this way, radicalization of *creatio ex nihilo* became the fact in the 4th century, and both Arius and Athanasius shared that conviction.[232]

---

231 *Cf*. R. Williams, *op. cit*., p. 208.

232 *Cf*. A. Louth, *The Origins…*, *op. cit*., p. 73. We see the evolution of the doctrine of creation even in the writings of Athanasius and his departure from the Origenistic view of the path of the soul to God. Because of the lack of the Platonic understanding of the kinship of the soul to God, also the Platonic doctrine of contemplation is transformed (pp. 75–76). Such a view was also

We can see, then, that the central problem which lay in the background of the discussion was the meaning of the Biblical doctrine of creation. This doctrine started to acquire its true Christian meaning and stood apart from the similar Platonic interpretation in *Timaeus*.

The outcome of this process, initiated by Arius' doctrine, was a change in the perception of the Universe which was very important for negative theology. In his general description of Post-Nicaean Orthodoxy, Andrew Louth shows this change as a shift from the Greek to the truly Christian worldview. In Middle-Platonism and Neoplatonism, the world was understood in a hierarchical way. The tendency to explain the process of creation by multiplying the elements which are in between may be observed even in Philo. This process had its continuation in Neoplatonism and elements of the noetic realm grew to vast number of beings and Gods. Although earlier Christian writers treated the Logos as such being "in between," in the 4th century, the doctrine of creation clearly meant that: "There is no intermediate zone between God and the World."[233] The world, then, is no longer divided into sensual and intellectual, but it is seen rather as having two "parts" which are totally incompatible: the Creator and the creation. This does not mean that the division into noetic and sensual completely disappeared, but it lost its importance. As we shall see, Gregory of Nyssa frequently uses this division, but it is not central in his worldview.

2.2.1 The knowledge of the image of God

In this Christian universe seen in a new way, the transcendence of God must be also seen differently. The lack of continuity between the Creator and the creation made Him more remote than ever before. Such a kind of transcendence could not have appeared in any Greek view because of the lack of the doctrine of creation seen in such a manner. The transcendence of

---

shared by other important theological figures of the 4th century, such as Eusebius of Caesarea, who, in his claims on the transcendence of God, frequently quoted Middle-Platonic Numenius of Apamea. However, J.M. Robertson notes that one of the primary reasons for Eusebius to confirm God's transcendence with such emphasis was his involvement in the Arian controversy, *cf. Christ as Mediator… op. cit.,* pp. 39–43.

233 A. Louth, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

God usually affects the claims as to the possibility of knowing Him, because if He is so remote, the ways of attaining positive knowledge significantly shrink, and negative theology seems to be the only one left.[234] If in the 4th century the transcendence of God was apparently affirmed with such emphasis, the result would seem to be the outburst of negative theology. We must not forget that Christians have the ultimate source of the knowledge of God, which is the Logos, but even if we admit that there is a division between natural knowledge and one obtained by the Revelation (which was non-existent in the 4th century), this would result in strengthening the problem of consubstantiality of the Divine Persons. The need to resolve the dialectical puzzle of the unknown Father and the known Logos becomes more important than ever. But can we say that Athanasius was aware of the problem, and can we observe the strengthening of negative theology in his writings?

To answer this question, we must note that in the writings of Athanasius, the problem is presented in a completely new perspective. In *De Incarnatione*, he draws the situation of man who rather worships idols, the natural elements and the stars, is driven by pleasures and does not want to know the truth, namely the Word of God. This was the state of sin and hence also the state of the lack of knowledge of God, which was caused not by the hiddenness of God, but by man turning away from Him:

> "Everything was completely filled with impiety and vice, and only God was ignored and his Word, although he had not hidden himself invisibly from men nor given them knowledge of himself in one way only, but had unfolded it to them in various fashions and in manifold ways."[235]

Athanasius enumerates the ways in which man can obtain the knowledge of God, and those ways are listed according to the history of Salvation of man. First of all, God made himself known according to the "grace of the Divine Image" (κατ' εἰκόνα χάρις), and this knowledge was sufficient to know the truth.[236] But since man was careless and did not want to know God by himself, He made a prevision for their carelessness and made Him

234 *Cf.* J.R. Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius*, Oxford 1993, p. 129.
235 *De Inc.* 11, 38–42 (Thomson, pp. 160–161).
236 *Cf.* J. M. Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

known by means of the creations. This, however, was not enough for man, who continued to "sink gradually to the worse," and, therefore, God sent the law and the prophets to instruct man, since man is able to learn more easily of the higher things this way.[237] This, however, was also not sufficient to make man turn away from sin and corporal pleasures. Therefore, the Son of God came down to this world to restore the image which had been contaminated and dimmed by the deeds of man: "So the Word of God came in His own person, in order that, as He is the image of His Father, He might be able to restore man who is in the image."[238] We can see that the whole problem of the possibility to know God is presented in a moral perspective. Sin is the main obstacle to obtaining the knowledge of God. Even if man has any natural powers to know God, he cannot make use of them because of the sin and turning away from God. Man had the means to perfect his knowledge of God because he was created in His image, but he did not make use of them as he was driven down by his animal nature, and this made God intervene and provide previsions (προενοήσατο) to help him. Even the way of knowing the Creator from the creations is a way provided by grace.

Athanasius is then very optimistic as concerns the possibility of man having the knowledge of God, but this optimism is based on the image of the Logos that is in the soul, so this is never a direct cognition, and it does not deny the transcendence of God. Describing the state of grace in paradise, Athanasius confirms that God is beyond human cognition when he says:

> "For God, the creator of the universe and king of all, who is beyond all being and human thought (ὁ ὑπερέκεινα πάσης οὐσίας καὶ ἀνθρωπίνης ἐπινοίας ὑπάρχων), since he is good and bountiful…"

but he adds:

> "…has made mankind in his own image through his own Word, our Saviour Jesus Christ; and he also made man perceptive and understanding (ἔννοιαν καὶ γνῶσιν) of reality through his similarity to him, giving him also a conception and knowledge of his own eternity, so that as long as he kept this likeness he might never abandon his concept of God (Θεοῦ φαντασίας)."[239]

237 *De Inc.* 12, 1–7 (Thomson, pp. 162–163).
238 *De Inc.* 13, 29–32 (Thomson, pp. 166–167).
239 *Con. Gen.* 2, 5–13 (Thomson, pp. 6–7).

So the very act of creation is sufficient to give man the knowledge of God, who resides in the soul, and if man is able to preserve his soul pure without turning to sensual things, the soul can reflect the Logos, the paradigm of its creation whom it is alike.[240] Such an optimistic view on man's knowledge of God is possible only, thanks to the Logos and its image in the soul, and even in the state of primal happiness it is based on the grace of God, not on natural human powers. Man can realize his blessed life by: "special power given him by the Father's word (ἐκ τοῦ πατρικοῦ Λόγου δύναμιν)."[241] We can observe that such a description of Adam's knowledge of God resembles the claims that Arius put forth on the Son of God, who, as we have seen, can know God only, thanks to the Father's own power (δύναμις), which was granted to him, but Athanasius underlines that for Adam grace is given from the Father and the Logos.

It is worth noting that Athanasius is convinced that the place in the soul where this knowledge of God resides is intellect (νοῦς), and he frequently uses the terms like ἔννοια, κατανοεῖν and λογίζεστθαι to describe it. He understands the intellect not only as the eye of the soul, but for him it is the only source of good intentions. So the soul can preserve its pure state when it listens to the intellect, but when it abandons the guidance of the νοῦς, it becomes corrupted and unable to sustain the cleanness of the image and the knowledge of God.[242] It can then contemplate the image of the Logos that is the same with the world of the intellectual objects only when it is free from sensual images. Even for man in the present state of sin the crucial move to obtain any knowledge of God is the ascent from sensual to intellectual objects, but this is not possible without special assistance of the incarnate Logos.[243]

---

240 *Cf.* G.C. Stead, *The Knowledge of God in Eusebius and Athanasius*, in: *Knowledge of God in Graeco-Roman World*, *op. cit.*, p. 233. G. C. Stead sees here the reference to the *Republic* 509 b, where God is said to be beyond human cognition, but this is contradicted in a fragment of Athanasius, which reads that God gave man the knowledge of His own eternity.

241 *Con. Gen.* 2, 13–14 (Thomson, pp. 6–7).

242 *Cf.* C.G. Stead, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

243 Athanasius uses the metaphor of the mirror to describe the contemplation of the Logos with the pure eye of the Soul. It seems that with this metaphor Athanasius confirms that it is possible for man to obtain the knowledge of

This optimistic theory, however, also confirms the transcendence of God. We cannot know him directly and even in the primal state of innocence man was able to know God only thanks to the image which he had in himself. The thought of Athanasius seems to develop to the point where there is no possibility of any knowledge of God which can be obtained by "purely" natural powers, so He stays totally out of reach of human mind and thus is absolutely transcendent.[244]

2.2.2 Knowing God from the creations

This total inability of the natural knowledge of God seems to contradict Athanasius' statements on the creations which reveal the Creator. Can we, then, call this knowledge natural? Having in mind the remark on the development of the doctrine of Athanasius, it is worth having a closer look at the fragments of *Contra Gentes*, where he explains his way of the cognition of God.

Before Athanasius comes to the topic, he underlines the primary place of the knowledge which the soul can have based on the image of the Logos that is present within it. The "soul's teaching" is insufficient because the possibility of seeing this image has been lost because of "external influences which disturb its mind."[245] Therefore, the presence of God's actions in the creations could be seen as the help God gives to fallen mankind. The image in the soul cannot be seen, but the order of the Universe can be observed and the existence of God deduced therefrom. Athanasius begins with the statement that God "is by nature invisible and incomprehensible, being

God even without the intervention (incarnation) of the Logos; nevertheless, the source of the knowledge is still the image of the Logos in the soul of man. *Cf.* A. Hamilton, *Athanasius and the Simile of the Mirror*, VCh, vol. 34, no. 1 (1980), pp. 17–18.

244 G.C. Stead sees the development of the doctrine of Athanasius noticing: "As in the *Contra Gentes*, they have an ability which is sufficient, αὐταρκης, to provide the knowledge of God; but in the *De Incarnatione* this is not the natural purity of the soul, but a special gift of grace, ἡ κατ᾽ εἰκόνα χάρις, designed to offset its inherent weakness" *op. cit.*, p. 237.

245 *Con. Gen.* 34, 27–28 (Thomson, pp. 94–95).

above all created being,"[246] and, therefore, man can miss the way to obtain the needed knowledge. It was necessary for man that God made Himself visible in His creations, and consequently He established the order of the Universe by means of His Word. Athanasius gives an example of a sculptor who, even if he does not stand next to his work, is present because sculpture testifies that he worked on this piece of stone. We can not only recognize the necessary existence of the maker, but also the character of his style since:

> "…from his works that an artist is often known, even when he is not seen; and people can say about Phidias the sculptor that his works through their symmetry and the mutual proportion of their parts reveal Phidias to observers, even when he is not present."[247]

In a similar way, the order of nature, raining in fruitful seasons, the courses of the stars, Sun shining at day and Moon at night, the exact number of days, etc., make man to admit that there must be the maker and ruler who is distinct from them.[248] God is also the one who makes the opposites in nature combined and having an order, and Athanasius enlists many examples which testify to such unity in multiplicity and harmony of nature,[249] which must have been made by the wise Creator and ruler.[250] But what the man can see in the order of nature is not exactly the God Himself but rather the Logos. And through Him we can see the Father Himself.[251] So it seems that what Athanasius says here takes us back to the same image of the Logos which man has in his soul. Man cannot see this image because of sin, but the order of the universe is but another image of the Logos, which is independent from our nature and, therefore, can always testify to the existence of the Word despite the fall of man. So, once again, this view of the knowledge of God is very optimistic, and even the fall of man does not make him totally incapable of obtaining the knowledge which he must have

246 *Con. Gen.* 35, 2–3 (Thomson, pp. 94–95). ἐπειδὴ ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατάληπτός ἐστι τὴν φύσιν, ἐπέκεινα πάσης γενητῆς οὐσίας ὑπάρχων. Ahtanasius puts a stress on the invisibility of God often using the argument that God is ἀόρατος but makes Himself visible in His works.
247 *Con. Gen.* 35, 2 (Thomson, pp. 94–95).
248 *Con. Gen.* 35, 8–12, (Thomson, pp. 94–97).
249 *Con. Gen.* 36, 1–35, (Thomson, pp. 98–101).
250 *Con. Gen.* 38, 1–7 (Thomson, pp. 102–103).
251 *Con. Gen.* 44, 1– 45, 5 (Thomson, pp. 120–123).

to turn back to God. However, this is yet another help, which the Creator provided to make man know Him and this kind of natural cognition is possible because of the providence of God who made use of the powers present in human nature, since he is "good and loving to mankind. (ἀγαθὸς γὰρ ὢν καὶ φιλάνθρωπος)."[252]

Therefore, negative theology which is natural in the fallen state of the soul, which cannot see invisible God, is something God overcomes by Himself.[253] This kind of speaking of God does not actually tell us anything useful and does not bring us closer to Him. Negative theology is rather an obstacle than a tool in the ascent to the Maker, and man cannot use it on his path to God. Therefore, what is striking here, according to Athanasius, we cannot have the knowledge of God based on any mystical experience. We can see it best in the *Life of Anthony*, where he makes no references to the darkness of Sinai.[254] So there is an absence of negative theology with the simultaneous stress on the transcendence of God which can be overcome only by the Logos and its Incarnation. We can say that Athanasius is reluctant to employ negative theology, which seems to be the obvious consequence of such a frequent use of it, which we have observed in Arius. However, a negative language seems to be the obvious choice of speaking about God who is the sole Creator and Governor of the Universe and thus is utterly transcendent to all human concepts. Nevertheless, we can say that at the starting point of Athanasius' theology, he fully agrees with Arius that God is utterly transcendent and incomprehensible. Therefore, we can even say that his attitude to the problem of the possibility of having the knowledge of God is apophatic.[255] But Athanasius proposes a way to overcome that

252 *Con. Gen.* 35, 5–8 (Thomson, pp. 94–95).

253 J.R. Lyman notes: "One can speak only negatively with assurance because of divine transcendence and incomprehensibility; yet what is revealed is absolute, for essences precede words, and the terms applied to God in Scripture reveal the essential divine nature" *op. cit.*, p. 129.

254 *Cf.* G.C. Stead, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

255 *Cf.* K. Anatolios, *Athanasius. The Coherence of His Thought*, London, New York 2005, p. 99. The author also notes that the use of negative terms by Athanasius refers to the Middle-Platonic rather than the Neoplatonic understanding of God, since he is described as a true being (τὸν ὄντος ὄντα Θεὸν), p. 40.

state of unknowing by stressing on the Incarnation. For Arius, this state is permanent, and by denying the divine nature of the Son, he ultimately fails to establish his role as a mediator who passes the knowledge of God to man and allows him to be saved.[256] Athanasius, on the contrary, simultaneously admits the transcendence of God while underlining and exposing the role of the Logos, which is God and the only means to gain true knowledge and return back to the unity with the Creator. Providing the knowledge of God to man was for Athanasius the main reason for the incarnation of the Logos.[257] However, this also means that the Bishop of Alexandria seems to be successful in overcoming the contradiction between the incomprehensible Father, who must be described by negative terms, and the conceivable Logos, which can be described in a positive way.

2.3 Positive and negative theology reconciled in Marius Victorinus

Marius Victorinus is the figure of special interest for understanding the influence which the Arian controversy had on negative theology. He lived in the West, in the Latin speaking part of Africa, almost exactly in the same period when in the East, the discussion between Eunomius, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa took place.[258] He not only used sophisticated Neoplatonic philosophy to defend the Orthodox position, but he is also an example of a different solution to the problem of how to reconcile negative theology with the Divinity of the Logos. As we have seen, for Athanasius, a negative language was to be overcome by the incarnation and revelation of the Logos. We have also suggested above that Marius Victorinus seemed to be convinced that negative theology can never be abandoned in our cognition of the Father.

The corpus of *Theological treatises on the Trinity* by Marius Victorinus begins with the letter of Candidus who presents Arian arguments against consubstantiality of the Son. Most of the scholars agree that Candidus was probably an invented figure, and if it is true, it was Marius Victorinus himself who presented his understanding of Arian arguments in this letter.[259]

256 *Ibid.*, p. 96.
257 *Cf.* J.M. Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 197.
258 *Cf.* P. Henry, *Plotin et l'Occident*, Louvain 1934, pp. 44–45.
259 *Cf.* P. Nautin, *Candidus l'Arien…*, *op.cit.*, pp. 309; 317.

The entire argumentation of the letter seems to be based on the statement, which can be found at its very beginning that God is unchangeable and, therefore, any claims of the generation of the Son who is consubstantial with the Father violate His unchangeability.

> "If therefore God is unchanging and unchangeable, but whatever is unchanging and unchangeable is neither begotten nor begetting; if then this is so, God is unbegotten. For begetting is begetting through alteration and through change."[260]

Begetting means a change, therefore the generated Logos, since it is the effect of a change, cannot be God. Such a claim would mean that it came to be God ensuing from something previous and more profound than God. Candidus argues that such things as existence, existentiality, potentiality substance or being would be somehow prior to the "to be" (*esse*) of God.[261] The Son could neither be generated from pre-existent substance, because God is simple, and that would ruin His simplicity.[262] Without going further into Candidus' (or Victorinus') philosophical distinctions, we can say that in his answer Victorinus must explain how the generation of God is not a change and does not ruin God's simplicity. To show this, he rather surprisingly goes into various distinctions of the kinds of being and non-being. Although the term "non-being" does not appear in Candidus' letter, as we have seen above, it was a well-known claim of Arius that the Son was created by the Father from non-being.

2.3.1 God as non-existent above existents

Victorinus' answer starts, however, with a long exposition of the impossibility of speaking about God. He explains that paternal intellect (νοῦς πατρικός) is innate in our soul, and, therefore, the heavenly spirit can arouse the intellectual figures which are eternally engraved in our soul. Therefore:

260 *Cand.* I, 1, 8–11. "Si igitur deus, inversibile et inmutabile, quod autem inversibile et inmutabile, neque genitum est neque generat aliquid, si igitur hoc sic se habet, ingenitus est deus. Etenim generatio per inversionem et per mutationem generatio est" (SC 68, p. 106; tr. Clark, p. 47).

261 *Cand.* I, 1, 12–16 (SC 68, p. 106; tr. Clark, pp. 47–48).

262 *Cand.* I, 2, 8–9. "Simplex enim quiddam deus. Non igitur praeexsistente substantia" (SC 68, p. 108; tr. Clark, p. 48).

"…our soul by the kind of spiritual elevation wishes to see ineffable things and instructable mysteries of the will or works of God. And yet, dwelling in this body it is difficult for the soul to understand those things, but impossible to express them."[263]

Then Victorinus claims that we can know God to some extent. It is possible thanks to the intellect given by God, but also thanks to the help of the spirit which can make us know God by some kind of intellectual conceptions or rather analogies (*figurationes intellectuales*). This opinion is very similar to what we have seen in Athanasius, who perceived the soul and the image of the Logos implanted in it as the primary source of the human knowledge of God in a similar way. But Victorinus also tries to show that Candidus is too confident in man's power to grasp the truth about God; while the understanding of God's mysteries and works is difficult, expressing them (*edicere*) is utterly impossible. He supports his opinion with the quotations from the Holy Scripture,[264] and after yet another quotation from the Scripture's teaching on the Son of God, he passes on to his demonstration.

First, he answers Candidus' claims that God is the cause of His own *esse*[265] by claiming that God is above existents and non-existents (*quae sunt et quae non sunt*)[266] which He produces, but He simultaneously is potentially all truly existents (*vere* ὄν) in order to be able to produce them.[267] Therefore, God the Father must be named the "total pre-existent" (*totum*

263 *Ad Cand.* 1, 4–12. "ineffabiles res et investigabilia mysteria dei voluntatum aut operationum quasi quaedam mentis elatio animae nostrae vult quidem videre et etiam nunc in tali sita corpore difficile intellegere solum, edicere autem impossibile" (SC 68, p. 130; tr. Clark, pp. 59–69).

264 Rom 11: 33, Is 40: 13.

265 *Cf. Cand.* I, 3, 10–14 (SC 68, p. 110; tr. Clark, p. 49).

266 There is a problem with terminology which must be mentioned here. The term τό μὴ ὄν in the case of Arius is commonly translated as "non-being", as we have seen above. In case of Victorinus, it was translated by M.T. Clark as "non-existent." This has its explanation in the complicated Latin terminology which Marius Victorinus creates in his writings. In the text, I quote M.T. Clark's translation, so I deliberately use a non-existent instead of non-being to preserve the sense and continuity of the text, but we have to remember that it is the same Greek term τό μὴ ὄν. It must be also noted that this problem of translation is part of a broader issue, which exceeds the scope of this study, of how to understand and translate the Greek term τό ὄν.

267 *Ad Cand.* 2, 16–25 (SC 68, p. 134; tr. Clark, p. 61).

προόν) which generates the Logos which is "total existent" (*totum* ὄν). Although we can describe the process of the Son this way, the very act of the generation of the Logos cannot be grasped properly by man's apprehension, so Victorinus calls it not simply a motion, but rather an "ineffable motion" (*ineloquibili motus*).[268] This way Victorinus tries to show that the generation of the Son cannot be understood as a motion which produces a change. The Logos that was produced that way as the "totally perfect existent" is in itself also above existents and truly existents, but is also "the first and universal knowledge (*prima et omnis intellegentia*)."[269] Victorinus then seems to think that the Logos is simultaneously the source of knowledge while being also above all beings – consubstantial with the Father. In the next passage, he further explains what he does understand by saying that God is the cause of existents and non-existents. Since God is called προόν, He is the cause of all modes of being and thus Victorinus defines all types of existents and non-existents one by one.[270]

Non-existents play a more important role here since it is best to call God the name of one of them. A non-existent (*id quod non est*) is first conceived and named "by way of negation, so that absolutely and in all ways there is privation of existence."[271] This mode is what we commonly understand as something that simply does not exist. Victorinus explains that "there is no μὴ ὂν according to privation; but it is a kind of fiction to imagine, starting from existents, the privation of them, and this fiction has neither the subsistence nor the existence of things which do exist."[272] Marius Victorinus follows here the long philosophical tradition, which goes back to Plato, of

268 *Ad Cand.* 2, 25–29 (SC 68, p. 136; tr. Clark, p. 62).
269 *Ad Cand.* 2, 31–35 (SC 68, p. 134; tr. Clark p. 63).
270 Marius Victorinus defines the modes of being in *Ad Cand.* 8–8 (SC 68, pp. 138–142; tr. Clark, pp. 64–67). This division and its philosophical background was well described by P. Hadot, *Porphyry et Victorinus*, Paris 1968, pp. 148–167.
271 *Ad Cand.* 4, 2–3 "iuxta negationem, omnino omnimodis ut privatio sit existentis" (SC 68, p. 136; tr. Clark, pp. 63–64).
272 *Ad Cand.* 5, 7–11 "nullum μὴ ὂν iuxta privationem, sed subintellegentia quaedam est, ab his quae sunt privationem eorum subintellegere, non subsistentis ne ipsius quidem subintellegentiae, neque sic exsistentis ut eorum quae sunt" (SC 68, p. 138; tr. Clark, p. 64).

making a distinction between absolute and relative non-being.[273] The first one is non-being in the absolute sense. The other three modes of non-being cannot be understood that way, and despite the fact that they are called "non-beings," they refer to it only relatively. Victorinus explains that those are "non-existents which exist in certain way."[274] The name of non-being "according to difference with another nature"[275] has its roots in the *Sophist* of Plato where he enlists the supreme genres, and since there is nothing else which can be the basis of the differentiation of those genres, we can only say that the one is not the other, like rest is not motion.[276] The third mode is described "according to 'to be' which is not yet but which can be and will be."[277] To understand this mode, we must turn to Aristotle who says in his *Metaphysics* that a being which is in potentiality and not yet actualized is in a sense a non-being, and it will be called properly a being after it passes to the state of action. This mode then serves to describe a motion and change.[278] Victorinus, however, groups those two types saying that they express mainly the generation of a being, and we name them "those which after their birth have 'to be' and named, but which before their birth were

273 P. Hadot notices that although the primal source of this distinction is Plato's *Sophist* (237 B; 238 C), Aristotle also evokes this division of ἁπλῶς μὴ ὄν and μὴ ὄν τι in his *Physics* (I, 3, 187 a, 5), *cf.* P. Hadot, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

274 *Ad Cand.* 5, 11 "Quaedam igitur quae non sunt quodam modo sunt" (SC 68, p. 138; tr. Clark, p. 64).

275 *Ad Cand.* 4, 2–3 "iuxta alterius ad aliud naturam" (SC 68, p. 136; tr. Clark, p. 64).

276 In *Sophist*, when searching for the definition of a Sophist the Guest from Elea proposes to redefine the Parmenidean definition of being which must be corrected or even rejected to define the supreme genres (being, motion, stability <or rest, or remaining>, identity and difference), *Sophist* 236 D-264 B (Plato VII, LCL, pp. 236–263).

277 *Ad Cand.* 4, 4–5 "iuxta nondum esse, quod futurum est et potest esse" (SC 68, p. 136; tr. Clark, p. 64).

278 In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle explains that: "But since non-being in the various cases has as many senses as there are categories, and besides this the false is said not to be and so is the potential (μὴ ὂν καὶ τὸ κατὰ δύναμιν), generation proceeds from the latter, man from that which is not man but potentially man, and white from that which is not white but potentially white, and this whether it is one thing that is generated or many" (*Met.* XIV, 2, 1098 a, 26–31).

either within their own potentiality or within another whence they have begotten."[279]

Most interesting is the last of the modes which is called by Victorinus a non-existent "according to 'to be' which is above all existents."[280] Although, as we have seen, God is above all modes of existents and non-existents, He can be called an existent as far as He is their cause, but Victorinus seems to be more inclined to call Him a non-existent in this last mode. "God is above ὄν, and insofar as he is above, God is called μὴ ὂν, not through privation of all that is His, but as another ὄν, the very one which is μὴ ὄν."[281] In another passage, where he summarizes his teaching on the modes of existent and non-existent, Victorinus comes back to the well-known Arian claim (here ascribed to Candidus), that the Logos was created from non-being.[282] His answer can be given thanks to the distinctions of non-beings. Although God is not the cause of all types, He is also above all and, therefore, we can speak of him in preeminent or negative terms:

> "Necessarily we say that through superiority and preeminence over τῶν ὄντων God is above all existence, above all life, above all knowledge, above every ὄν and the ὄντως ὄντα; indeed he is unknowable, infinite, invisible, without idea, insubstantial,

279 *Ad Cand.* 5, 11 "ut ipsa quae sunt, quae post generationem et sunt et dicuntur et ante generationem aut in potentia sua aut in alio fuerunt, unde generata sunt" (SC 68, p. 138; tr. Clark, p. 64).

280 *Ad Cand.* 4, 5 "iuxta quod supra omnia quae sunt, est esse." (SC 68, p. 136; tr. Clark, p. 64). It is significant that this type of non-existent was for the first time named by Porphyrius (P. Hadot, *op. cit.* p. 170), whose philosophy Victorinus uses to such an extent that there are large fragments of Porphyrius' commentary to Parmenides which have been preserved only, thanks to Victorinus' quotes.

281 *Ad Cand.* 4, 6–14 "Appellabimus utique omnino ὄν, quoniam eorum quae sunt, pater est. Sed pater eorum quae sunt, non est τὸ ὄν; nondum enim sunt ea quorum pater est, et non licet dicere, nefas est intellegere, eorum quae sunt causam ὄν appellare. Causa enim prior est ab his quorum causa est. Supra ὂν igitur deus est et, iuxta quod supra est, μὴ ὂν deus dicitur, non per privationem universi eius quod sit, sed ut aliud ὄν, ipsum quod est μὴ ὄν" (SC 68, p. 136; tr. Clark, p. 64).

282 *Ad Cand.* 12, 7–10 "Forte nunc dicis, o Candide: meus hic sermo est et secundum istam rationem dico ex his quae non sunt, natum esse filium dei secundum effectionem, non secundum generationem" (SC 68, p. 148; tr. Clark, p. 69).

> inconceivable, and because transcendent, he is nothing of existents, and because he is above existents, he has nothing from existents. God is therefore μὴ ὄν."[283]

Victorinus' answer to the Arian claim is then simple. It is true when we say that the Logos originated from non-being, but the problem lies in the understanding of non-being, since it is not something that does not exist, but rather the Father is non-being because he transcends all that is. It is worth mentioning what Pierre Hadot has noted. Although there is a long tradition of the classification of the modes of non-being, which especially flourished in the Neoplatonic tradition,[284] we cannot identify the source of Victorinus' own list. Its origins may be Porphyrian, but we do not have any preserved fragment of Porphyry which would prove it. But it is intersecting that Victorinus puts them in a hierarchical order from non-existent which simply is not, to non-existent above existent, which is more than being.[285]

2.3.2 Negative theology in speaking of God as the One

Negative theology appears once more in a place where in his treaty *Adversus Arium* Victorinus describes God as the One (*unum*) and Monad (*unalitas*).[286] Victorinus explains that by calling God the One, he means not the Father alone but the Father and the Son who being Two are One.[287] Pierre Hadot notes that in Victorinus' long exposition we can trace the Middle-Platonic systematized methods or ways of speaking of God, especially those of Albinus and Celsus.[288] In the text of *Adversus Arium*, we

---

283 *Ad Cand.* 13, 5–12 "Necessario per praelationem et per eminentiam τῶν ὄντων deum dicemus supra omnem exsistentiam, supra omnem vitam, supra omnem cognosccntiam, supra omne ὂν et ὄντως ὄντα, quippe inintellegibile, infinitum, invisibile, sine intellectu, insubstantiale, inio cognoscibile, et quod super omnia, nihil de his quae sunt, ct quoniam supra quae sunt, nihil ex his quae sunt. Μὴ ὂν ergo deus est" (SC 68, p. 148; tr. Clark, p. 70).

284 *Cf.* P. Hadot, *op. cit.*, pp. 169–170.

285 *Ibid.*, p. 171.

286 *Adv. Ar.* I, 49, 9. Term *unalitas* is commonly translated as "monad"; tr. Clark, p. 171 (French - "la Monade"; tr. P. Hadot, SC 68, p. 343).

287 *Adv. Ar.* I, 49, 9 (SC 68, p. 342; tr. Clark, p. 171).

288 P. Hadot notes that it is possible that the systematization of theological ways was influenced by Stoics who developed methods of abstract cognition, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

can find the way of eminence (or anteriority), the way of negation, and the way which Pierre Hadot calls "transcendent synthesis." Marius Victorinus offers a Latin version of the first two ways, which in Greek had technical forms of words beginning with: -ὑπερ or -προ (way of eminence) and -ἀ (negative way).[289]

According to the first method, God is described as being above all reality. He is "before all existence, before all existentiality, and absolutely before all inferiors, before the ὄν itself; indeed this One is prior to the ὄν; it is therefore before every entity, substance, subsistence, even before those things which are more powerful."[290] In those terms, we see the echo of the long tradition which had its origin in Plato's famous phrase ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας and was strengthened and had its continuation in Neoplatonism. This is also an answer to Candidus who defined God primarily as *esse solum*.[291]

According to the second way, Victorinus enumerates various negative terms. God as One is:

> "infinite, invisible, wholly indiscernible for every other, both for those within it and those which are after it; for it alone is distinguished and defined only by its own existence, not by act, so that its own constitution and self-knowledge are not something different from it; undivided in every way, without shape, without quality, that is not qualified by any lack of quality yet without colour, without species, without form, lacking all forms, and yet not being that form itself by which all things are formed."[292]

289 *Cf.* P. Hadot, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

290 *Adv. Ar.* I, 49, "unum ante omnem exsistentiam, ante omnem exsistcntialitatem et maxime ante omnia inferiora, ante ipsum ὄν; hoc enim unum ante ὄν; ante omnem igitur essentitatem, substantiam, subsistentiam et adhuc omnia quae potentiora…" (SC 68, p. 342; tr. Clark, p. 172).

291 *Cand.* I, 3, 16. "Ipse est unum et solum. Est enim esse solum. Et vero ipsum esse, ipsum est et vivere et intellegere" (SC 68, p. 110; tr. Clark, p. 49).

292 *Adv. Ar.* I, 49, 19–26. "invisibile, indiscernibile universaliter omni alteri et his quae in ipso et his quae post ipsum, etiam quae ex ipso, soli autem sibi et discernibile et definitum, ipsa sua exsistentia, non actu, ut non quiddam alterum sit ab ipso consistentia et cognoscentia sui, inpartile undique, sine figura, sine qualitate neque inqualitate, sine qualitate, quale, sine colore, sine specie, sine forma, omnibus formis carens, neque quod sit ipsa forma qua formantur omnia…" (SC 68, p. 342; tr. Clark, p. 172).

Then Victorinus passes to the way of transcendent synthesis, which we have seen already when he called God *totum* προόν and "non-existent above existent." Here, he likewise calls God by the names of: first cause of all existents, preknowledge of all knowledge, the strength of all powers, swifter than movement itself, more stable than rest itself, closer than any continuum, more profound than all of discontinuous, more finite than a body, greater than greatness, purer than incorporeal reality, power of all powers, more universal than every genus and species, etc.[293] Those terms can be understood as describing God even more accurately than the negative way. Those are not simply negations, but they express better the One that is above all privation and negation; therefore, God is simultaneously called to be greater than the opposite things as follows: corporal-incorporeal, movement-rest, finite-infinite, and having and non-having qualities. Thanks to such a way of speaking, Victorinus can express that calling God with negative term does not bring us any closer to the understanding of who He is. If we, for example, call God infinite, one can think that infinity is some kind of a concept which allows our intellect to grasp His nature in some way, but infinity as a negative term neither describes Him nor is a kind of a conception. To ensure that such a mistake will never be made, Victorinus explains that God is simultaneously beyond infinity and is finite. Another aspect of using this way of speaking is the reconciliation of opposite terms; God is beyond each of the opposites, and, therefore, he unites them above them. Therefore, we can say that those terms clearly indicate that God is utterly transcendent, and thus He cannot be conceived in any way. Finally, Pierre Hadot notes that it is no longer negative theology since it lacks

293 *Adv. Ar.* I, 49, 26–40. "…et universalium et partilium omnium quae sunt prima causa, omnium principiorum praeprincipium, omnium intellegentiarum praeintcllcgcntia, omnium potentiarum fortitudo, ipsa motione celebrior, ipso statu stabilior - motione enim ineloquibili status est, statu autem ineffabili superelativa motio est - continuatione omni densior, distantia universa altior, definitior universo corpore et maius omni magnitudine, omni incorporali purius, omni intellegentia et corpore penetrabilius, omnium potentissimum, potentia potentiarum, omni genere, omni specie magis totum, vere ὄν totum, vere quae sunt omnia ipsum exsistens, omni toto maius, corporali et incorporali, omni parte magis pars, inenarrabili potentia pure exsistens omnia quae vere sunt" (SC 68, pp. 342–344; tr. Clark, p. 172).

privations and is a way of speaking of the One which coincides with the *maxima*. Such ultimate cognition is more than ignorance, because it does not oppose ignorance; therefore, it transcends both affirmation and negation.[294] Therefore, it is the best way to express incompatibility of any human conception, whether negative or positive, and the best way to express the impossibility of having any intellectual grasp of the Ultimate Principle.

However, we must be aware that those ways of describing God are applicable to God the Father, which Victorinus affirms by saying: "This is God, this is the Father, preexisting preintelligence and preexistence keeping itself and its own happiness in an immobile movement…"[295] The Son can be also called the One, but in a different aspect. While the Father is totally above our cognition: "This One whom we call the One who is One (*unum unum*) is life, which is infinite movement, creative of others, whether of the truly existents or of the existents, being the Logos of the 'to be' of all existents."[296] The Son is then not the same with the absolute One, with the Father, but rather he should be called One-One, that is the Dyad. Without going further into the philosophical references of this claim,[297] we can observe once again what we have seen previously in *Ad Candidum*. The negative way is more proper when we try to describe the Father – the One as Monad, and positive theology plays the main role in speaking of the Son who is Dyad. Therefore, we can also observe the way in which Victorinus tries to answer Arian claims.

Arius, who frequently used the term μονάς, claimed that the absolute simple Father can be spoken of only in negative terms. Victorinus seems to agree fully with such statement. We have seen in *Ad Candidum* that negative theology should be primarily the way of speaking of the Father, whereas

---

294 *Ibid.*, p. 283.

295 *Adv. Ar.* I, 50, 1–3. "Hic est deus, hic pater, pracintellegentia praeexistens et praeexsistentia beatitudinem suam et inmobili motione semet ipsum custodiens…" (SC 68, p. 344; tr. Clark, p. 172).

296 *Adv. Ar.* 51, 1–4. "Sed unum istud quod esse dicimus unum unum, vita est, quae sit motio infinita, effectrix aliorum, vel eorum quae vere sunt, vel eorum quae sunt, exsistens λόγος ad id quod est esse quae sunt omnia" (SC 68, p. 346; tr. Clark, p. 173).

297 Pierre Hadot gives a full philosophical background of this statement in *op. cit.*, pp. 285–288.

the positive way is fitting when we speak of the Son. In *Adversus Arium*, Victorinus uses the same pattern when speaking of the two aspects of God as the One. But Arius claimed that since we can speak of the Logos in a positive way and understand Him, He cannot be consubstantial with the Father. Victorinus strongly disagrees here claiming that positive and negative ways of theology are the two modes of describing the same God; therefore, the Father and the Son are consubstantial. So he claims that the use of negative and positive theologies does not necessarily result in the opposition between the Father and the Son. Where Arius saw discontinuity, Victorinus puts a stress on continuity. Therefore, it is an attempt at systematic reconciliation between positive and negative theology in Marius Victorinus. It is remarkable that he does all those demonstrations and distinctions in an utterly theoretical fashion without pointing out the meaning of negative theology to mystical life. So it seems that in his writings, the systematic and rigorous theology of Arius has met its perfect match.

3. "You Worship What You Do Not Know"

At the middle of the 4th century AD, the discussion on consubstantiality of the Son of God significantly changes because of two new figures: Aetius and Eunomius. They represented a new approach to the problem of Divine generation to such an extent that their contemporaries considered them as a whole new group of theologians, which were called Anomeans or Eunomians. It is worth mentioning here that, if the remarks of R.P.C. Hanson are correct, it is hard to say that in the first half of the 4th century, there was a movement or group that perceived themselves as Arians.[298] This time we have a group of the heterodox that can be distinguished by the convictions they shared. However, there are two main issues that they had in common with Arius: they denied consubstantiality of the Son of God, and, what is more important for the subject matter of this work, the central issue of their theology was the problem of how can we know God.

This new theological approach was initiated by Aetius. He was claimed as the first one who attached himself to the Aristotelian philosophy and, as H.A. Wolfson notes, the fight as to the proper use of syllogism began.[299] Aetius was also known as the author of the thesis that to know God as unbegotten means to know his οὖσία.[300] Although we have the text of Aetius' main work – *Syntagmation*, this work is so schematic and difficult that it is impossible to comprehend the meaning of large parts of the text without references to Eunomius' *Apology*, where most of his thesis was repeated by his disciple.[301] It is, however, worth having a closer look at this text, as it contains interesting claims on the possibility to know God's essence.

298 *Cf*. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 123–128.

299 H.A. Wolfson, *Philosophical Implications of Arianism and Apollinarianism*, DOP, vol. 12 (1958), p. 9.

300 R. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

301 L.R. Wickham shows the history of the text and its two preserved variants, along with the problems of interpretation of the treatise: *The Syntagmation of Aetius the Anomean*, JTS vol. XIX, Pt. 2, 1968, pp. 533–535.

3.1 "Ingeneracy" as a positive attribute and the essence of God

Although *Syntagmation* is often described as a work full of syllogisms and a kind of an Aristotelian turn in theology, Aristotelianism of Aetius is problematic. L.R. Wickham notes that if we try to see demonstrations which this work contains according to the standard definition of syllogism, none of the claims of Aetius is presented as a deduction from two premises. So we can call those demonstrations "syllogistic" only in a broader sense in which all deductive proofs are syllogistic.[302] Moreover, all presented points are not introduced in a fashion where an argument logically follows from the previous one; it resembles rather switching from one issue to another.[303] Nevertheless, he wanted to set his work in a particular fashion, which is based on pure reasoning. It is significant that although Aetius wants the reader to be assured that his work is "based on the mind of the Holy Scripture,"[304] he never quotes any passage from the Bible. Therefore, he shared a very optimistic view on the power of human mind, which alone, without the aid of faith, can demonstrate that the Son's essence is different from the Father's.

In *Syntagmation*, we find frequent claims on the transcendence of God the Father. He is "superior to any cause" (πάσης αἰτίας ὑπάρχει),[305] superior to origination, surpasses every nature, and, therefore, God cannot be even called self-caused. Simultaneously, we have a precise indication of the essence of God. The term "ingenerate" (ἀγεννήτος) plays the central role because it allows to know who God is and it alone properly names His

302 *Cf.* L.R. Wickham, *op. cit.*, p. 534.

303 L.R. Wickham notes: "I am left with the impression that these are arguments bearing upon a particular theme, arguments which the author has devised and used over a number of years and which he has now strung together in a series." *op. cit.*, p. 535. A.A. Radde-Gallwitz suggests that the work of Aetius was the response to Athanasius' *De synodis*; therefore, he wanted to gather arguments which would reduce his opponent's view of ingeneracy to absurdity. A. Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Cesarea, Gregory of Nyssa and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, Oxford 2009, p. 90.

304 *Synt. Introduction*, Wickham p. 545.

305 *Synt.* 2, p. 540; 3, p. 541 πάσης αἰτίας κρείττων ὑπάρχει; 18, p. 542 οὐσία κρείττων ἐστί γενέσεως; 30, p. 543 ὑπεράγει πάσης φύσεως.

essence.[306] Aetius treats "ingeneracy" as the very name which is intrinsic to the substance and is revelatory of the essence, which cannot be ascribed to God on the basis of any human observation.[307] He boldly and in an explicit way argues that it is not only the concept of a human mind:

> "If ingeneracy does not represent the substance (ὑπόστασιν) of the Deity, but the incomparable name is of human imagining (ἐπλνοίας ἐστίν ἀνθρωπίνης τὸ ἀσύγκριτου ὄνομα), the Deity is grateful to those who thought the name up, since through the concept of ingeneracy he has a transcendence of name which he does not bear in essence."[308]

The word "ingeneracy" is a privation, as it signifies the one who is not generated, but Aetius does understand this term as negative only in a certain aspect. He argues that if we apply a privation to God's essence, it would mean that we apply some kind of non-being to it, and he clearly confirms that the terms which we use are intrinsically linked with the essences which we name. Therefore, he claims:

> "If ingeneracy is revelatory of privation in respect of God, and ingeneracy were non-entity (μὴ ὄντος), what kind of reasoning would deprive the non-existent of a non-entity? If it signifies reality (ὄν), who would part God in his real being from himself?"[309]

It seems that Aetius argues that the term "ingeneracy" cannot be predicated of God only in the negative sense, because it would signify something which does not exist (or is non-being) in God. If "ingeneracy" is non-being, there is nothing "ingeneracy" can be applied to. On the other hand, if it designates something real, "ingeneracy" is an intrinsic property and cannot be separated from God – it is who He is. The only possible conclusion is, then, to admit that "ingeneracy" is not a negative property but rather a positive one, and it also cannot negate any positive property, since God cannot lack who He is.

306 *Synt.* 16, p. 542.
307 *Cf.* DelCogliano's discussion on his understanding of this name in: M. DelCogliano, *op. cit.*, pp. 30–31.
308 *Synt.* 12, pp. 541–542.
309 *Synt.* 19, p. 542. Εἰ στερήσεώς ἐστι δηλωτικόν ἐπὶ θεοῦ τὸ ἀγέννητον, μηδὲν δὲ εἴη τὸ ἀγέννητον, ποῖος λόγος ἂν ἀφαιρήσειε τοῦ μὴ ὄντος τὸ μηδέν; εἰ δὲ ὂν σημαίνει, τίς ἂν χωρίσειεν ὄντος θεόν, ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἀυτὸν ἑαντοῦ.

Those explanations confirm that "ingeneracy" is a positive predicate, but what exactly Aetius means by that claim? R. Mortley suggests that in order to understand that we must turn to 4th-century Neoplatonism. He finds similarity of fragment 16 not only to *Cratylus* (as Wickham suggests), but also to Dexippus, who comments on Aristotle's *Categories*.[310] There is similarity between Aetius and Dexippus who discuss whether the negation of attributes can reveal substance.[311] However, negation usually does not provide a good definition, because if one wants to define something in a negative way, he can enumerate what this thing is not practically indefinitely. But Dexippus notes that there are some cases when a negative definition can provide a good grasp of the essence, when one can be sure that there are only three options. He gives an example of "indifferent" which can be defined as something that is neither good nor bad.[312] A. Radde-Gallwitz notes that Aristotle's definition of the substance is also an example of this kind of a negative approach, but he also observes that it is very unlikely that Aetius knew Dexippus' commentary, because the latter does not consider using such a definition in theology. Moreover, it seems that Aetius completely misunderstood Dexippus' argument.[313] Therefore, this does not explain how to understand ingeneracy in a positive way, and we must investigate further.

Aetius continues his explanation in the next argument by trying to define what exactly can we name in God when we speak of Him in a negative way,

310 R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, t. II, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

311 *Dexippi in Aristotelis categorias commentarium*, p. 44, 16. ἵνα διὰ τῆς ἀποφάσεως αὐτῶν τὴν κυριωτάτην οὐσίαν δηλώσῃ. The version of the same problem is also commented by Simplicius, *cf.* A. Radde-Gallwitz, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

312 This is an example, which comes from Aristotle *Cat.* 12 a, 20–25. ἐπ' ἐνίων μὲν οὖν ὀνόματα κεῖται τοῖς ἀνὰ μέσον, οἷον λευκοῦ καὶ μέλανος τὸ φαιὸν καὶ ὠχρόν· ἐπ' ἐνίων δὲ ὀνόματι μὲν οὐκ εὔπορον τὸ ἀνὰ μέσον ἀποδοῦναι, τῇ δὲ ἑκατέρου τῶν ἄκρων ἀποφάσει τὸ ἀνὰ μέσον ὁρίζεται, οἷον τὸ οὔτε ἀγαθὸν οὔτε κακὸν καὶ οὔτε δίκαιον οὔτε ἄδικον. (Bodéüs, p. 55) "In some cases there exist names for the intermediates, as with grey and yellow between white and black; in some, however, it is not easy to find a name for the intermediate, but it is by the negation of each of the extremes that the intermediate is marked off, as with the neither good nor bad and neither just nor unjust." (tr. Barnes).

313 *Cf.* A.A. Radde-Gallwitz, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

and he does that by interrogating whether ingeneracy may be a condition/ possession[314] (ἕξις) or privation (στέρησις):

> "If privations are abstractions of conditions (στέρεσις ἕξεών εἰσιν ἀφαίρεσις), ingeneracy in respect of God is either a privation of condition or a condition of privation. If it is a privation of condition, how should what is not present be counted as present to God? If ingeneracy is a condition, a generate essence must have existed first, in order that thus acquiring a condition of being, it may be named 'ingenerate'. If the generate participated in the ingenerate essence, having undergone the loss of its condition it will have been deprived of generation. Its essence would then be generate and ingeneracy would be a condition."[315]

The key to understanding this fragment is the meaning of a condition (possession). L.R. Wickham notes that opponents unanimously see here the influence of Aristotle.[316] In *Categories*, when discussing quality, he described condition (ἕξις) and state (διάθεσις) as the first kind of quality. Those two differ because condition is something which can be easily changed while state is "being more stable and lasts longer,"[317] and, therefore, the definition is: "It is what are easily changed and quickly changing that we call conditions, e.g. hotness and chill and sickness and health and the like."[318] Aetius assumes that ingeneracy is a kind of quality, but we can also see why he uses condition instead of state, which seems to be a more reasonable choice when speaking about God. He wants to put a stress on changeability of God's essence, since in his eyes, the Orthodox position is nothing else than the application of a change in his essence and it is a condition which changes more easily, so ingeneracy would be a contingent property of God's essence.

---

314 There is some confusion here because the term ἕξις has different translations. Wickham translates it as "a condition," whereas in the fragments of *Cathegories* of Aristotle quoted below a contradiction between ἕξις and στέρησις is translated as possession and privation. In both cases, the meaning of the word seems to be the same, because it concerns the state of having a certain feature or lacking it.

315 *Synt.* 20, p. 542.

316 L.R. Wickham, *op. cit.*, p. 561.

317 *Cat.* 8 b, 27–28. μὲν οὖν εἶδος ποιότητος ἕξις καὶ διάθεσις λεγέσθωσαν. διαφέρει δὲ ἕξις διαθέσεως τῷ μονιμώτερον καὶ πολυχρονιώτερον εἶναι· (Bodéüs, p. 39; tr. Barnes).

318 *Cat.* 8 b, 35–37. διαθέσεις δὲ λέγονται ἅ ἐστιν εὐκίνητα καὶ ταχὺ μεταβάλλοντα, οἷον θερμότης καὶ κατάψυξις καὶ νόσος καὶ ὑγίεια καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα τοιαῦτα· (Bodéüs, p. 40; tr. Barnes).

But the argument starts with a very important "if," which suggests once again that what Aetius means is that condition be treated as abstract from the essence of God and that is exactly what privation means. He sees two possibilities here: first, ingeneracy could be privation of condition; (στέρησις ἕξεως) second, it could be a condition of privation (ἕξις στερήσεως). By linking the concepts of privation and condition, Aetius wants to describe two kinds of movement – losing or gaining an attribute. God must either have lost a quality of generacy (positive condition), or must have acquired a negative condition of ingeneracy, which in this case is the absence of this quality. L.R. Wickham explains it with the example of being bald: "baldness is either the lost state of having one's hair or the state of having lost one's hair."[319] In the first case (privation of condition), we return to the conclusion of the previous argument and God who has lost the condition of being generate, cannot be something He is not. In the second case (condition of privation) arguments are applied to the Father and the Son. If the Father has acquired the condition of ingeneracy, he must have had the condition of generacy first, and then privation of that condition can be acquired, which is absurd. In the case of the Son, if he participated in ingeneracy, he would have lost his condition of being generated and could no longer be called the Son. This is also absurd since the Son cannot have both the generated essence and the condition of ingeneracy.

To understand better these conclusions, we must turn once again to Aristotle's *Categories*, where he considers classes of oppositions. He says that one thing can oppose another in four ways: as relatives (τὰ πρός τι), as contraries (τὰ ἐναντία), as privation and possession (ὡς στέρησις καὶ ἕξις), or as affirmation and negation (ὡς κατάφασις καὶ ἀπόφασις).[320] We can see that Aetius clearly refers to the third kind of opposition between privation and possession (or condition). But why does he classify opposition of ingeneracy and generacy to be the third kind? It cannot be a relative opposition, because in this case, opposition does not mean that they are contrary to one another. Aristotle gives examples of the double and the half, and of

319 L.R. Wickham, *op. cit.*, p. 562.

320 *Cat.* 11 b, 17–19 Λέγεται δὲ ἕτερον ἑτέρῳ ἀντικεῖσθαι τετραχῶς, ἢ ὡς τὰ πρός τι, ἢ ὡς τὰ ἐναντία, ἢ ὡς στέρησις καὶ ἕξις, ἢ ὡς κατάφασις καὶ ἀπόφασις (Bodéüs, p. 53).

the knowledge and the knowable. In both cases, the definition of one thing is possible, thanks to the other; therefore, we say that the double is called what it is because it is the double of something (in this case – the half). Similarly, we say that knowledge is defined because it is the knowledge of something (knowable), and, vice versa, the object of knowledge is something that could be known.[321] It is obvious that ingeneracy is not what it is because it is ingeneracy of generacy, as the opposition in the sense of a relation depends on something that the two have in common.[322]

The second case must also be excluded because "things opposed as contraries, however, are never called just what they are, in relation to one another, though they are called contraries of one another."[323] Aristotle gives an example of good and bad, where good is not called good of the bad, and this example shows that contraries are not defined because of a third thing between them, as we will see below. Ingeneracy and generacy do not oppose each other in the fourth sense, because this is a contradiction which occurs in predication and, therefore, "for only with them is it necessary always for one to be true and the other one false."[324]

The third kind of opposition may be applied to ingeneracy and generacy because they are the "qualities" of the essence of God, and in this kind, privation and possession (στέρησις καὶ ἕξις) also refer to a third thing. Aristotle gives an example of blindness and sight, which are oppositions in connection with the eye, and says "each of them is spoken of in connection with whatever the possession naturally occurs in."[325] He also explains that privation occurs when it is entirely absent from the thing which naturally

321 *Cat.* 11 b, 24–33 (Bodéüs, p. 53). Although it is not easy to differentiate between the first and the third kind of opposition, Aristotle extensively explains why the relative one is not the same with the opposition of privation and possession (*Cat.* 12 b, 17–13 a, 36; Bodéüs, pp. 57–60).

322 It is possible that Aetius excludes this possibility in argument 16.

323 *Cat.* 11 b, 33–35 τὰ δὲ ὡς τὰ ἐναντία, αὐτὰ μὲν ἅπερ ἐστὶν οὐδαμῶς πρὸς ἄλληλα λέγεται, ἐναντία μέντοι ἀλλήλων λέγεται· (Bodéüs, p. 53; tr. Barnes).

324 *Cat.* 13 b, 3–4. ἐπὶ μόνων γὰρ τούτων ἀναγκαῖον ἀεὶ τὸ μὲν ἀληθὲς τὸ δὲ ψεῦδος αὐτῶν εἶναι (Bodéüs, p. 53; tr. Barnes).

325 *Cat.* 12 a, 26–29. Στέρησις δὲ καὶ ἕξις λέγεται μὲν περὶ ταὐτόν τι, οἷον ἡ ὄψις καὶ ἡ τυφλότης περὶ ὀφθαλμόν· καθόλου δὲ εἰπεῖν, ἐν ᾧ πέφυκεν ἡ ἕξις γίγνεσθαι, περὶ τοῦτο λέγεται ἑκάτερον αὐτῶν (Bodéüs, p. 55; tr. Barnes).

has it, and at the time when it is naturally for that thing to have it.[326] Aristotle's explanations reveal to us why "ingeneracy" is not a negative predicate. When we call someone blind, he is really blind, and although blindness is in him as the lack of sight, it cannot be treated only negatively, because his blindness is not something non-existent in him. We can define blindness because of the absence of sight which is natural, so for this definition to be true, we need a third thing which is the nature of the eye. Similarly, although we define "ingeneracy" as an opposition to "generacy," it cannot be treated as a purely negative attribute. What Aetius seems to mean here is that God is not "ingenerate" because of the lack of "generacy," since He was prior to it. Moreover, "ingeneracy" is natural to God's essence and not something which God can lose.

All those arguments show also that ingeneracy cannot be treated as privation. Since generacy is posterior to ingeneracy, it is rather the opposite – it is generacy which is the privation and loss of condition. Therefore, ingeneracy cannot be understood as merely a kind of quality, but is rather a positive attribute of God, which expresses His essence.[327] Aetius confirms his conclusion in section 24, where he puts a stress on treating ingeneracy as God's essence: "If ingeneracy is privation, privation loss of condition," this would mean that we admit a change in unchangeable God,[328] and in the next section, he also states that ingeneracy cannot be privation in the sense that it is something which does not belong to God.[329] Therefore, it seems that in the end, Aetius is rather inclined to give us a negative answer to the question why "ingeneracy" cannot be understood as a negative predicate,

---

326 *Ibid.* 12 a, 27–29 (Bodéüs, p. 55).

327 It is clearly stated in the next argument (21, p. 542–543) that treating ingeneracy as quality would mean confusion of the essence and its incidents: "If ingeneracy and generacy are each conditions, the essences are prior to the conditions, and yet the conditions, though secondary to the essences, are none the less qualitatively superior." Ending his argument, Aetius says: "Since the ingenerate nature imports nothing into itself, how can it be a condition and not an essence?"

328 *Synt.* 24, p. 543. Εἰ τό ἀγέννητων στέρησις, ἡ δὲ στέρησις ἕξεως ἀποβολή ἐστν…

329 *Synt.* 25, p. 543. "If ingeneracy shows a privation which does not belong to God, on what grounds do we say he is ingenerate and cannot be generate?" Εἰ τό ἀγέννητον δηλοῖ στέρησιν ηὴ προσοῦσαν τῷ θεῷ, πῶς ἀυτὸν ἀγέννητσν εἶναι λέγομεν, γεννητὸν δὲ μὴ εἶναι.

because all possible cases when we treat it in a negative way can be reduced to unacceptable conclusions.

This also seems to be the way how Eunomius understood "ingeneracy." In his *Liber Apologeticus*, he states that:

> "He is not such [unbegotten] by the way of privation; for if privatives are privatives with respect to the inherent properties of something, then they are secondary to their positives. But birth has never been an inherent property of God. He was not first begotten and then deprived of that quality so as to become unbegotten."[330]

Therefore, what Eunomius points out is that in the case of God, "ingeneracy" cannot be a negative condition, because being generated is not an antecedent property of God of which He could be deprived. But what exactly do we know when we admit that ingeneracy is the essence of God? Aetius seems to give an answer to this question in argument 29:

> "If the ingenerate substance is indicated along with the essence of the offspring as its cause, since it is precisely the same in respect of all cause it is incomparable essence per se. It does not indicate its unapproachability externally but is per se incomparable and unapproachable since it is also ingenerate."[331]

Because of ingeneracy of the Father, he is also incomparable and unapproachable (ἀσύγκριτος καὶ ἀπρόσιτος). The central problem of this passage is the meaning of the term ἀπρόσιτος. Some scholars see here a reference to the first Letter to Timothy (6: 16), where God is "dwelling in light unapproachable," and, therefore, the term means "incomprehensible" or "unknown." However, in his commentary, L.R. Wickham notes that such interpretation opposes the claims that were later developed by Eunomius, namely that we can know the essence of God.[332] It is also inconsistent with earlier claims of Aetius himself who so strongly defended the assertion that ingeneracy is the essence of God. It is very hard to argue that we exactly know who the Father is and at the same time claim that he is

---

330 LA 8, 7–10: ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδὲ κατὰ στέρησιν· εἴ γε τῶν κατὰ φύσιν αἱ στερήσεις εἰσὶ στερήσεις, καὶ ἕξεων δεύτεραι. οὔτε δὲ κατὰ φύσιν ἦν τις τῷ θεῷ γένεσις, οὔτε προτέραν ἔχων ταύτην εἶτα στερηθεὶς γένομεν ἀγέννητος (Vaggione, p. 42–43).

331 *Synt.* 29, p. 543. Eἰ τῇ τοῦ γεννήματος οὐσία συνεμφαίνεται ὡς αἰτία ἡ ἀγέννητος ὑπόστασις, κατά πάσης ἀιτίας τὸ ἀπαράλλακτον ἔχουσα, ἀυτὸ οὐσία ἐστίν ἀσύγκριτος, οὐκ ἔζωθεν συνεμφαίνουσα τὸ ἀπρόσιτον, ἀυτὸ δὲ ὑπάρχουσα ἀσύγκριτος καὶ ἀπρόσιτος, ἐπειδὴ καὶ ἀγέννητος.

332 *Cf.* Wickham, *op. cit.*, p. 565.

incomprehensible. Therefore, L.R. Wickham's interpretation seems to be sound, when he explains: "ἀπρόσιτος I think, then, means here, 'incomparable/utterly transcendent', and, so far as the knowledge of God is concerned, Aetius and Eunomius held, I believe, (a) that it is false to say that the essence of God is unknown – for this would imply that God is irrational, (b) that God's essence is known as transcendent and unique, (c) that there is no knowledge of God by way of mystical communion with his essence."

Therefore, the knowledge of the essence of the Father does not exactly mean that we know who he is, but rather we know that he is essentially transcendent and unapproachable. Although Aetius claimed that the term "ingeneracy" indicated the essence, the term itself means for us only His absolute transcendence. Such interpretation is also consistent with the next argument, where he puts a stress on the total transcendence of God by saying that He: "surpasses every nature" and that "ingeneracy is not revelatory of essence."[333]

It seems, then, that Aetius attempted to complete the impossible task to reconcile the transcendence of God with the possibility of the knowledge of God's essence. It must be noted that if to know God does not mean to really understand his essence, the term "ingeneracy" ultimately means that we understand His essence as utterly transcendent. But can we say that by such statement we really understand what God is? It seems that we can only accept the name of "ingeneracy" which was revealed to us, and, therefore, all syllogisms in *Syntagmation* can be treated rather as showing the consequences of rejecting this name, which, as Aetius wants to demonstrate, always leads to absurd conclusions.[334]

If Aetius really thought that we understood the essence this way, it seems very unconvincing, because in fact "ingeneracy" does not tell us anything new about what God is since it seems to be only a conception of His transcendence. But it is evident that the question of what does it mean to know God becomes the central problem of this phase of the polemic.

333 *Synt.* 30, p. 543. Εἰ ὑπεράγει πόσης φύσεως ὁ παντοκράτωρ, διὰ τό ἀγέννητον ὑπεράγει, ὅπερ ἐστίν αἴτιον τοῖς γεννητοῖς διαμονῆς. εἰ δὲ μὴ ἔστιν οὐσίας δηλωικὸν τὸ ἀγέννητσν, πόθεν ἂν ἡ τῶν γεννητῶν φύσις ἕξει τὸ διασῴζεσθαι.

334 *Cf.* DelCogliano, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

3.2 Worship and knowledge – a puzzling question

In *Syntagmation*, we have observed a specific way of presenting arguments. Throughout the work, we can identify attempts to perform something similar to the Stoic procedure of reduction of non-simple arguments to the series of undemonstrated arguments, which need no proof because they are self-evident. In section 20, we find one of the arguments categorized as undemonstrated: "not first therefore not the second."[335] Such a way of presenting arguments, almost as they would be answers to the questions which were asked to the author, is very characteristic of the Anomean style.[336] This reflects the missionary manner which was used in attempts to convince Christians that the Anomean doctrine was right. We can observe it also in the question which will be analysed in this fragment of our analysis.

In one of his letters, Basil provides his explanation to Amphilochus of Iconium, a bishop who apparently struggled with the Anomean, or rather (since the letter itself was written relatively late) the Eunomian missionary activity and wanted to know how to deal with their puzzling questions.[337] The supporters of Eunomius asked their Orthodox opponents: "Do you worship what you know or what you do not know?"[338] There are only two possible answers to such a question, but the goal of the whole argumentation is to reduce these two answers to one. The obvious reply is that "We know what we adore," and if such an answer is given, another question immediately follows: "What is the substance of what is adored?" Admitting ignorance of the substance causes the claim: "Then you adore what you do not know."[339] If the opponent's answer at the beginning is that he does not

---

335 I think that similarity can be found despite the fact that we do not have the full set of Stoic rules preserved, *cf.* B. Mates, *Stoic logic*, Berkeley 1961, pp. 77–82.

336 *Cf.* L.R. Wickham, *op. cit.*, p. 536.

337 Amphilochus was Basil's relative who had worked as a lawyer and had no experience in theological issues before he become the bishop of Iconium, *cf.* Kopecek, *op. cit.*, p. 431.

338 *Ep.* 234, 1, 1. Ὃ οἶδας σέβεις, ἢ ὃ ἀγνοεῖς (Courtonne, p. 41; LCL 243, p. 371).

339 *Ep.* 234, 1, 1–6. Ἐὰν ἀποκρινώμεθα δτι ὃ οἴδαμεν τοῦτο προσκυνοῦμεν, ταχεῖα παρ᾽ αὐτῶν ἡ ἀπάντησις· τί ἡ οὐσία τοῦ προσκυνουμένου; Ἐὰν δὲ ἀγνοεῖν ὁμολογήσωμεν τὴν οὐσίαν, πάλιν ἡμῖν περιτρέψαντες λέγουσιν ὅτι οὐκοῦν ὅ οὐκ οἴδατε προσκυνεῖτε (LCL 243, p. 371).

know what he adores, there is no need to ask any further questions. Therefore, the whole argumentation leads to the admission of ignorance of those who do not know God's essence. This tricky question is called captious by Basil,[340] since it both forces the opponent to answer and to admit that he is completely ignorant of God who he worships. A. Radde-Gallwitz notes that it is similar to Meno's paradox, but here "enquire after" is replaced with "worship."[341] Therefore, if you know who you worship, there is no need for any inquiry, and if you do not know, how can you obtain any knowledge of who to worship, since you do not know.[342] So the goal of the question would be to show the absurdity of the claims of the Orthodox. But I think there is more to it than that. Another goal of the question can be seen in the context of the Biblical passages to which it refers.

Despite of all claims that are present in Christian literature from the time of the 2nd century that Christians have the true knowledge of God, this question bring to mind at least two very important passages from the Holy Scriptures. In the dialogue between Jesus and a Samaritan woman, the Saviour says: "You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews."[343] In the second fragment, when speaking at the Areopagus, St Paul says that the Greeks have built an altar and worshiped "an unknown God," while this God is

---

340 *Ep*. 234, 1, 10 (Courtonne, p. 42, LCL 243, p. 373).

341 *Cf*. A. Radde-Gallwitz, *op*. *cit*., pp. 123–124.

342 *Cf*. *Meno* 80 D-E. "M.: And how will you search for something, Socrates, when you don't know what it is at all? I mean, which of the things you don't know will you take in advance and search for, when you don't know what it is? Or even if you come right up against it, how will you know that it's the unknown thing you're looking for?

S.: I see what you're getting at, Meno. Do you realize what a controversy you're conjuring up? The claim is that it's impossible for a man to search either for what he knows or for what he doesn't know: he wouldn't be searching for what he knows, since he knows it and that makes the search unnecessary, and he can't search for what he doesn't know either, since he doesn't even know what it is he's going to search for" (tr. R. Waterfield, p. 113).

343 J 4: 22. ὑμεῖς προσκυνεῖτε ὃ οὐκ οἴδατε, ἡμεῖς προσκυνοῦμεν ὃ οἴδαμεν, ὅτι ἡ σωτηρία ἐκ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐστίν· (tr. RSVCE). As we will see below, Gregory of Nyssa makes his argument against this question by referring to this passage of the Scripture (CE III, 1, 105–110; GNO II, 39–41).

the one, whom the Christians adore. Therefore, he says: “For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What, therefore, you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”[344] Therefore, the goal of the Eunomian paradox would be rather to show that the Orthodox are like the Samaritans or the Greeks who worship an unknown God, whereas those are true Christians who know the object of their adoration. This accusation would have been especially painful in relation to the fragment of the Acts, because of all arguments so strongly confirmed by the Apologists that the Christians are those who really know the truth about God.

But the paradox has one assumption which will be exposed and undermined by the opponents. The Eunomians assume that to know God means to know his essence. If the Orthodox admitted that they know God’s essence, they would immediately argue that it is “ingeneracy,” and this sets the problem of the generation of the Son in the convenient perspective of admitting that His substance must be different from that of the Father. Therefore, the question of what it means to know God becomes once again one of the key issues in demonstrating inferiority of the Son.

3.2.1 The distinction between “that is” and “what is”

Basil’s answer is based on undermining the claim that to know God means to know His essence, since “knowing has many meanings.”[345] He enumerates many attributes of God that we know: “the greatness of God, and His power, and His wisdom, and His goodness, and His providence whereby He cares for us, and the justice of His judgment.”[346] But the knowledge of the attributes does not allow to know substance, and the conception (ἐννοία) of God which we have is the combination of our knowledge of attributes

344 Acts 17: 23. διερχόμενος γὰρ καὶ ἀναθεωρῶν τὰ σεβάσματα ὑμῶν εὗρον καὶ βωμὸν ἐν ᾧ ἐπεγέγραπτο, ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ. ὃ οὖν ἀγνοοῦντες εὐσεβεῖτε, τοῦτο ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν (tr. RSVCE).

345 *Ep.* 234, 1, 5–6 (Courtonne, p. 42; LCL 243, p. 371).

346 *Ep.* 234, 1, 6–9 Καὶ γὰρ τὴν μεγαλειότητα τοῦ Θεοῦ εἰδέναι λέγομεν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν καὶ τὴν σοφίαν καὶ τὴν ἀγαθότητα καὶ τὴν πρόνοιαν ᾗ ἐπιμελεῖται ἡμῶν καὶ τὸ δίκαιον αὐτοῦ τῆς κρίσεως, οὐκ αὐτὴν τὴν οὐσίαν (Courtonne, p. 42.; LCL 243, p. 373).

(ἀπηριθμησάμεθα). In the following passage, Basil refutes the argument that, since God is simple, all attributes are of his essence. He calls such a statement a sophism, which involves "countless absurdities"[347] and asks whether all those attributes are the name of one substance: "And are His awfulness and His benevolence equivalent to each other. His justice and His creative power. His foreknowledge and His requiting, His magnificence and His providence?"[348] Since the substance of God is one but names are different and even contrary to each other, they cannot be the names from which we can gain the knowledge of the essence. Basil says more precisely what are all those attributes – they are activities of God:

> "But if they say substance is something else, let them not mislead us by citing its simplicity. For they themselves have confessed that substance is one thing and each of what was enumerated was another. 'Nay, the activities are varied and the substance is simple.' But we say that from His activities we know our God, but His substance itself we do not profess to approach. For His activities descend to us, but His substance remains inaccessible."[349]

At the end of Letter 234, he adds that: "…from the activities is the knowledge, and from the knowledge is the worship,"[350] so admitting that one knows the activities is sufficient to confirm that one has the knowledge of who he worships, and this seems to be the core of Basil's answer. By making a distinction between substance and activities (ἐνέργειαι), he tells us that we can know only what the works of God are, because we can see the effects of his activities in the sensual world. Activities cannot give us the knowledge of the essence, but only of the existence of God. This distinction between substance and activity seems to be very important, especially in the context of Eunomius' theological methodology, which he exposes in his

347 *Ep*. 234, 1, 14 σόφισμά ἐστι μυρίας τὰς ἀτοπίας ἔχον. (LCL 243, p. 373; Courtonne, p. 42).

348 *Ep*. 234, 1, 16–19 Καὶ ἰσοδυναμεῖ ἀλλήλοις τὸ φοβερὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ φιλάνθρωπον καὶ τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὸ δημιουργικόν, τὸ προγνωστικὸν καὶ τὸ ἀνταποδοτικόν, τὸ μεγαλεῖον καὶ τὸ προνοητικόν (Courtonne, p. 42; LCL 243, p. 373).

349 *Ep*. 234, 1, 27–31 Ἀλλ' αἱ μὲν ἐνέργειαι ποικίλαι, ἡ δὲ οὐσία ἁπλῆ. Ἡμεῖς δὲ ἐκ μὲν τῶν ἐνεργειῶν γνωρίζειν λέγομεν τὸν Θεὸν ἡμῶν, τῇ δὲ οὐσίᾳ αὐτῇ προσεγγίζειν οὐχ ὑπισχνούμεθα. Αἱ μὲν γὰρ ἐνέργειαι αὐτοῦ πρὸς ἡμᾶς καταβαίνουσιν, ἡ δὲ οὐσία αὐτοῦ μένει ἀπρόσιτος (Courtonne, p. 42; LCL 243, p. 373).

350 *Ep*. 234, 3, 12–13. Οὐκοῦν ἀπὸ μὲν τῶν ἐνεργειῶν ἡ γνῶσις, ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς γνώσεως ἡ προσκύνησις (Courtonne, p. 43; LCL 243, p. 377).

Liber apologetics, but it will be discussed fully in the next chapter of this book. Here, I would like to focus on Basil's approach to the knowledge of the existence of God and its consequences.

Basil repeats three times that we can know that God exists, but two of those texts present a problem in the context of knowing the essence:[351]

> "But I do know that He exists, but what His substance is I consider beyond understanding." (Ἐγὼ δὲ ὅτι μὲν ἔστιν οἶδα, τί δὲ ἡ οὐσία ὑπὲρ διάνοιαν τίθεμαι.)[352]

> "Knowledge of His divine substance, then, is the perception of His incomprehensibility; and that is to be worshipped which is comprehended, not as to what its substance is, but as to that its substance exists." (Εἴδησις ἄρα τῆς θείας οὐσίας ἡ αἴσθησις αὐτοῦ τῆς ἀκαταληψίας, καὶ σεπτὸν οὐ τὸ καταληφθὲν τίς ἡ οὐσία, ἀλλ' ὅτι ἐστὶν ἡ οὐσία.)[353]

In those passages, Basil makes a distinction between ὅτι ἔστιν οὐσία – that substance exists, and τι/τις οὐσία – what substance is. Looking for the source of this distinction, we turn to Aristotle's *Posterior analytics*, where at the beginning of the second book, he enumerates the objects of inquiry to characterize the order of demonstration, which passes from the knowledge of the fact to the knowledge of the essence. Those objects are the fact (τὸ ὅτι), the reason why (τὸ διότι), if it is (εἰ ἔστι), and what it is (τί ἐστιν).[354] There is a lot of uncertainty in the understanding of this passage,[355] but it is clear that Aristotle wants to explain the mode of investigation, which leads from the fact or the recognition that something exists to the essence of things. Throughout *Posterior Analytics*, he maintains that the perception of the fact ought to precede the answer to the question "what it is." This distinction also corresponds to the distinction between perception and thought, and the knowledge of the fact and the knowledge of the reason why.[356] But the

351 The third one (2, 10–12) will be commented below.
352 *Ep.* 234, 2, 8–9 (Courtonne, p. 43; LCL 243, p. 375).
353 *Ep.* 234, 2, 12–14 (Courtonne, p. 43; LCL 243, p. 375).
354 *Anal. Post.* II, 1, 89 b, 23–25. Τὰ ζητούμενά ἐστιν ἴσα τὸν ἀριθμὸν ὅσαπερ ἐπιστάμεθα. ζητοῦμεν δὲ τέτταρα, τὸ ὅτι, τὸ διότι, εἰ ἔστι, τί ἐστιν. (tr. Barnes).
355 The most difficult question is the distinction between τὸ ὅτι and εἰ ἔστι since both concern the existence of the object. See J. Barnes commentary in: Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, Oxford 2002, pp. 203–204.
356 *Cf.* O. Harari, *Knowledge and Demonstration. Aristotle's Posterior Analytics*, Springer 2004, p. 130.

perception of the fact is not equated with experience, it is rather a perceptual understanding which differs from experience as having universal validity, since it grasps typical features of particular instances. In the passages where Aristotle explains this kind of perception, he uses the term αἴσθησις as an apprehension of the universal.[357] This, however, is not sufficient to have the knowledge of the reason why, that is the understanding of the essence. O. Harari underlines that perceptual understanding "is not considered full-fledged knowledge since perceptual understanding does not capture the essence of the object, according to its conceptual characterizations."[358] The conceptual understanding, on the contrary, is the full apprehension of an object which really exists, because it is the explanation of its essence.

Aristotle's explanation of the demonstrative procedure is very similar to Basil's claims about the knowledge of the possibility of knowing God. The two terms of Basil's explanation (ὅτι ἔστιν οὐσία – that substance exists and τι/τις οὐσία – what substance is) correspond to the first and the fourth term from *Posterior Analytics* (the fact – τὸ ὅτι and what it is – τί ἐστιν). If he, indeed, evokes the demonstrative procedure presented by Aristotle, his explanation means that we cannot execute this demonstration in the case of God. We can only confirm that God is, but we can never pass to what He is. What is interesting, the perception of the existence of God can be made only on the basis of God's activities, which "descend to us." In *Posterior Analytics*, the first phase of the procedure can be understood as admittance of the fact which occurs on the basis of certain properties of the investigated thing, just like the eclipse which is the attribute of the moon.[359] It is possible that we have a similar mode of ὅτι ἔστιν in Basil's explanation.

There is yet another thing which can be understood better in the context of Aristotle's text. This is the expression of Basil's[360] that we can have the ἡ αἴσθησις αὐτοῦ τῆς ἀκαταληψίας (the perception of His incomprehensibility).

---

357 *Cf. ibid.*, p. 131.
358 *Ibid.*, p. 132.
359 See the commentary of W.D. Ross in: *Aristotle's Prior and Posterior Analytics*, Oxford 1957, p. 610. In the 5th century, Aristotle's commentary was ascribed to Philoponus (the authorship is currently questioned) and the first part of the demonstrative procedure is understood this way, *cf.* 337, 18–32 (Philoponus, *On Aristotle Posterior Analytics* 2; tr. O. Goldin, Bloomsbury 2014, p. 19).
360 *Ep.* 234, 2, 12–13 (Courtonne, p. 43; LCL 243, p. 375).

Is it possible that Basil says that incomprehensibility can be the object of sensual perception? As we have seen above, in the context of the presented demonstrative procedure, Aristotle uses the term αἴσθησις as perceptual understanding, which has universal validity. If we understand Basil's expression this way, we can understand the perception of incomprehensibility as a kind of the universal grasp of the characteristic feature of God. The use of this term also escapes the suggestion that incomprehensibility can be the object of conceptual understanding, which is the grasp of essence. Therefore, if Basil indeed meant to use this term in Aristotle's sense, he was very precise in saying that we can grasp incomprehensibility in a universal manner, but it is a kind of perception, not comprehension. In other words, we can see with some certainty that comprehension of God is impossible.

3.2.2 Faith and understanding

Another problem of Basil's answer to Amphilochus is the question of how to understand faith and its relation to understanding. Having admitted that one can know that God exists, but His essence is beyond understanding, he asks:

> "How then am I saved? Through faith. And it is faith enough to know that God is, not what He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."[361]

Basil uses here the same distinction between "that is" (ὅτι ἐστὶν) and "what is" (τί ἐστι) in the context of the knowledge sufficient to have faith. He refers to Hebrews 11:6, where the belief in the existence of God is presented as needed to approach God and receive the reward.[362] Basil returns to the problem of faith and after quoting the Gospel (9:28), he says:

> "Thus worship follows faith, and faith is strengthened by power. But if you say that he who believes also understands, from what he believes, from this also he understands; or even the reverse, from what he understands, from this also he

361 *Ep.* 234, 2, 10–12. Πῶς οὖν σώζομαι; Διὰ τῆς πίστεως. Πίστις δὲ αὐτάρκης εἰδέναι ὅτι ἐστὶν ὁ Θεός, οὐχὶ τί ἐστι, καὶ τοῖς ἐκζητοῦσιν αὐτὸν μισθαποδότης γίνεται (Courtonne, p. 43; LCL 243, p. 375).

362 This is actually a paraphrase of the original text, and it also resembles other fragments of the Holy Scripture, *cf.* A. Radde-Gallwitz, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

> believes. But we understand God from His power. Therefore we believe in Him whom we understand, and we worship Him in whom we believe."[363]

The interpretation of Hebrews 11:6 has led to a conclusion that worship follows faith, but why in the next phrase does Basil contrast it with the statement that it is the understanding that follows faith, and why it is put in the manner of a discussion, since it starts with "if you say"? This actually is but another paraphrase of the Biblical text of Isaiah 7:9, which in the Septuagint version claims: μὴ πιστεύσητε, οὐδὲ μὴ συνιῆτε (if you believe not, neither will you understand).[364] Therefore, Basil evokes here another fragment of the Holy Scripture, which seems to contradict the one that has been quoted previously. It is evident that this fragment supports the Eunomian position that the knowledge of the essence is necessary since understanding is the outcome of faith. Basil tries somehow to combine worship with understanding in the last sentence of this passage, but since such explanation is not sufficient, he continues the topic in the next letter by asking what is first: knowledge or faith.[365] Although it could seem confusing, the answer is clear:

> "Generally, in the sciences, faith goes before knowledge, but in our own teaching, even if someone says that knowledge must exist before faith, we do not disagree - knowledge, however, commensurate with human comprehension."[366]

In the sciences (ἐπὶ τῶν μαθημάτων), belief must go before knowledge, because at the beginning of the process of gaining knowledge one must accept

---

363 *Ep*. 234, 3, 15–21. Οὕτως ἡ μὲν προσκύνησις τῇ πίστει ἀκολουθεῖ, ἡ δὲ πίστις ἀπὸ δυνάμεως βεβαιοῦται. Εἰ δὲ λέγεις τὸν πιστεύοντα καὶ γινώσκειν, ἀφ' ὧν πιστεύει ἀπὸ τούτων καὶ γινώσκει· ἢ καὶ ἀνάπαλιν ἀφ' ὧν γινώσκει ἀπὸ τούτων καὶ πιστεύει. Γινώσκομεν δὲ ἐκ τῆς δυνάμεως τὸν Θεόν. Ὥστε πιστεύομεν μὲν τῷ γνωσθέντι, προσκυνοῦμεν δὲ τῷ πιστευθέντι (Courtonne, pp. 43–44; LCL 243, p. 377).

364 Verse is translated this way only in *Septuagint*. In *Vulgate*, it has a different meaning: *nisi credideritis*, *non permanebitis* (if you believe not, you will not stand firm at all).

365 Courtonne notes that the letters to Amphilochus 233–236 had been probably a single memorandum which was later divided according to the questions and answers (Courtonne, *op. cit*., vol. 3, p. 39).

366 *Ep*. 235, 1, 12–14 Ἡμεῖς δὲ λέγομεν ὅτι καθόλου μὲν ἐπὶ τῶν μαθημάτων πίστις γνώσεως προηγεῖται· ἐπὶ δὲ τοῦ καθ' ἡμᾶς λόγου, κἂν λέγῃ τις προκατάρχειν τὴν γνῶσιν τῆς πίστεως, οὐ διαφερόμεθα (γνῶσιν μέντοι τὴν τῇ ἀνθρωπίνῃ καταλήψει σύμμετρον) (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 44; LCL 243, pp. 377–379).

the truth which he acquired, he must be convinced that it is true. Basil does not speak here about faith in the sense of believing in the truth about God which comes from the Scripture. He rather describes the general mode of acquiring knowledge which is present in all investigations. So this is rather a belief, than faith. To understand, for example, the Pythagorean Theorem, one must have heard about it and accept the formula as true. He must be convinced that it is true what he has heard to start the process of demonstration which leads to understanding. The difference is that at the beginning one accepts it as true because of the authority of someone else, and in the end, when one has understood the theorem, one accepts the truth by the authority of one's own reason. We can see that Basil presents here the process of demonstration similar to the above-presented passage from "that is" to "what is," from the partial or imperfect admittance of the truth to the perfect grasp of the essence of the thing, which can be shown by demonstration. Such description of the process of learning goes deep in the ancient tradition. We can find its traces in the famous allegory of the cave from Plato's *Republic*. The first step on the way of going out of the cave, the moment of philosophical conversion, is turning away from the shadows to the perception of the sensual things itself. This is the moment "when one was freed and suddenly compelled to stand up, turn his neck around, walk, and look up toward the light…"[367] Turning towards true sensual objects is described as turning from εἰκασία to πίστις, and belief is necessary to start upon the road which finally leads to the true knowledge of the ideas (νόησις) – the objects in sunlight outside of the cave.

Plato's famous allegory was a lesson which was developed by its readers and interpreters, but we also have the testimony that it was known and well understood by the Church Fathers. Probably the best example is Augustine, who frequently referred to the fragment of Isaiah 7:9.[368] It can be clearly seen in the fragment of *De quantitate animae*, where Augustine explains

---

367 *Resp.* 514 A-516 C (tr. C.D.C. Reeve, Cambridge 2004, p. 207).

368 In case of St Augustine, the faith is also very often treated as religious one, while he frequently uses *credere* in meaning of natural belief necessary to obtain *intelligere* – understanding. *Cf.* T. Stępień, *Nisi credideritis*, *non intelligetis –Belief as a Form of Natural Cognition in Writings of St Augustine's*, Studia Pelplińskie vol. XLIX (2016), pp. 287–300.

to Evodius how can we obtain the knowledge in geometry. He makes a distinction between trusting the word of another and trusting our own reason. For some persons, it suffices to accept someone else's word because it saves time and effort. But the long road of reading and learning, which goes through many sophisms and "swamp or errors," finally leads to the situation when one has the right and certain reason, free from falsehood and confirmed in truth.[369] The difficult road to the true knowledge is very much similar here to the painful process of going out of the cave from the *Republic*. This also resembles what Basil means by referring to grammar:

> "For in the sciences one must first take it on faith that the letter spoken is alpha, and later, having learned the characters and their pronunciations, grasp also the exact notion (κατανόησιν) of the force of such letter."[370]

---

369 Augustinus, *De quantitate animae* I, 7, 12. "To trust the word of another is one thing; to trust our own reason is a different thing (*Aliud est enim cum auctoritati credimus*, *aliud cum rationi*); to take something on authority is a great timesaver and involves no toil. If this way has any attraction for you, you may read in the extensive writings of great and good men what they thought should be said about these subjects as a safe and easy guide for the unlearned; and these men aimed at securing the confidence of persons whose minds, being either too slow or too occupied, could find no other safe road to truth. Such persons, whose number is very great, if they wish to grasp the truth by reason, are easily taken in by sophisms that land them in the swamp of error from which they never or only with difficulty succeed in emerging and extricating themselves. For these, then, it is a decided advantage to trust a most reliable authority (*excellentissimae auctoritati credere*) and to shape their conduct according to it. If you think that such a way is safer, I shall not only offer no resistance, but shall thoroughly approve. But, if you cannot bridle your eager conviction of coming to the truth by reason (*persuasisti ratione pervenire ad veritatem*), you must be prepared for long, hard, and circuitous riding, pursuing the path where reason beckons – that reason alone which is worthy of the name, that is, right reason (*vera ratio*). Not only is it right, but it is also sure (*certa*) and free from every semblance of falsehood, if man can ever attain to that state where no false argument or specious pretext can make him betray the truth" (Trape, vol. III/2, pp. 31–32; tr. J.J. MacMahon, pp. 71–72).

370 *Ep*. 235, 1, 5–9. Ἐπὶ μὲν γὰρ τῶν μαθημάτων πιστεῦσαι δεῖ πρῶτον ὅτι ἄλφα λέγεται καί, μαθόντα τοὺς χαρακτῆρας καὶ τὴν ἐκφώνησιν, ὕστερον λαβεῖν καὶ τὴν ἀκριβῆ κατανόησιν τῆς δυνάμεως τοῦ στοιχείου (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 44; LCL 243, p. 379).

For Basil, just like for Augustine, this is the description of the process of learning, but this procedure taken from sciences (μαθημάτων) is different from the way in which we acquire the knowledge of God, where knowledge also could precede faith. Referring to the Romans 1:20, he says that first thing which we have is the notion of the existence of God (ἡ ἔννοια ἡ περὶ τοῦ ὅτι ἐστὶ) which we can have from his works. Those are invisible things (τὰ ἀόρατα), which are manifested in the creation of the world. Since we know that God is Creator, we also accept him as our Lord, which leads to worship. Therefore, at the end of the passage, he gives the order of these acts:

1. Knowledge of the existence of God.
2. Faith follows that knowledge (accepting that He is our Lord).
3. Worship follows faith.[371]

It is worth reminding what Basil said in the previous fragment: that knowledge can be situated before faith in this process, but it must be "commensurate with human comprehension" (ἀνθρωπίνῃ καταλήψει σύμμετρον). This measure of comprehension expands only to the limit of knowing that God does exist; what is above, it lies beyond human intellect.

After the full description of the ways in which we can obtain the knowledge of God, Basil comes back to the meaning of the word "knowledge" which has many significations (πολύσημόν ἐστι). The main objection is that Eunomians thought up the paradox which relies on understanding knowledge only in one universal (καθόλου) way.[372] But a thing may be known in different aspects with respect to (κατὰ): number, size, power, manner of subsistence, time of generation, and substance.[373] Basil also shows that such

371 *Ep.* 235, 1, 5–9. Ἐν δὲ τῇ περὶ Θεοῦ πίστει ἡγεῖται μὲν ἡ ἔννοια ἡ περὶ τοῦ ὅτι ἐστὶ Θεός, ταύτην δὲ ἐκ τῶν δημιουργημάτων συνάγομεν. Σοφὸν γὰρ καὶ δυνατὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ πάντα αὐτοῦ τὰ ἀόρατα ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου κτίσεως νοοῦντες ἐπιγινώσκομεν. Οὕτω δὴ καὶ Δεσπότην ἑαυτῶν αὐτὸν κατα δεχόμεθα. Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ παντὸς μὲν τοῦ κόσμου δημιουργὸς ὁ Θεός, μέρος δὲ κόσμου ἡμεῖς, καὶ ἡμῶν ἄρα δημιουργὸς ὁ Θεός. Ταύτῃ τῇ γνώσει ἡ πίστις ἀκολουθεῖ καὶ τοιαύτῃ πίστει ἡ προσκύνησις (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 44; LCL 243, p. 379).

372 *Ep.* 235, 2, 1–5 (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 45; LCL 243, p. 379).

373 *Ep.* 235, 2, 5–9. τὸ δὲ κατὰ μέγεθος, τὸ δὲ κατὰ δύναμιν, τὸ δὲ κατὰ τὸν τρόπον τῆς ὑπάρξεως, τὸ δὲ κατὰ τὸν χρόνον τῆς γεννήσεως, τὸ δὲ κατ' οὐσίαν (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 45; LCL 243, p. 379).

various meanings of the term "knowledge" are used in the Holy Scripture, but Eunomians "pushing all those things aside, reduce knowledge to one significance, the contemplation of the very substance of God."[374] The examples of two paradoxes of knowing the sand, and knowing Timothy, show that such a distinction of the various aspects of knowing is present in our cognition of sensual objects, and one may claim that one both knows and is ignorant of a thing in different aspects. Therefore, the final answer given by Basil is that we must know what can be known about God, but we must not go further claiming that we know what cannot be known:

> "But our position is that we confess that we know what is knowable about God, and yet to "know" anything, on the other hand that escapes our comprehension is impossible."[375]

3.3 You are like the Samaritans…

Since the letters commented above were probably a single letter in the form of a memorandum (ὑπομνηστικόν), which was circulated among the Orthodox, we can assume that Gregory of Nyssa knew its content. But in the third book of *Contra Eunomium*, which he wrote after Basil's death, he felt that it was necessary to comment on the same paradox of worshiping the unknown. Perhaps, Eunomians were still active at that time, or perhaps he thought that some additions must be made to Basil's position. After a long comment on the passage from Proverbs 8,22, which was the Biblical basis for Eunomius' argument concerning the created nature of the Son,[376] he discusses the misunderstanding of being only-begotten and offspring by his opponent.[377] Then, Gregory begins a long passage on incomprehensibility of God, which is a side path of his demonstration, since coming back to the discussion of the meaning of the term "offspring," he says: "The argument,

---

374 *Ep.* 235, 3, 23–25. Οἱ δὲ πάντα ταῦτα παρωσάμενοι ἐπὶ ἓν σημαινόμενον τὴν γνῶσιν ἕλκουσι, τὴν θεωρίαν αὐτῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ τῆς οὐσίας (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 46; LCL 243, pp. 383–385).

375 *Ep.* 235, 2, 13–15. Αλλ' ἡμεῖς εἰδέναι μὲν ὁμολογοῦμεν τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, εἰδέναι δέ τι πάλιν ὃ ἐκφεύγει ἡμῶν τὴν κατάληψιν (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 45; LCL 243, p. 381).

376 CE III, 1, 4–65 (GNO II, 4–27).

377 CE III, 1, 66–102 (GNO II, 27–38).

however, has gone beyond what was intended, by following the continual sequence of conclusions."[378]

In this fragment, Gregory unwinds an extensive argument with much more radical claims on incomprehensibility of God than we have observed in the answer given by Basil. He starts with the statement that there is no interpretation (ἑρμηνείαν), outline (ὑπογραφὴν), or explanation (ἐξήγησιν) of the essence of God, and he can only affirm that "it is not possible to grasp what is in its infinite nature (ἀόριστον φύσιν) in any concept (ἐπινοίᾳ)."[379] Referring to Psalm (144/145:3,5), he says that since the things about God are endless, His essence is even more infinite and, therefore, it cannot be limited in any way.[380] By means of nouns and verbs, we grasp the meaning of an object, and it is a kind of an enclosure and limitation. Therefore, there is no name that can grasp the incomprehensible (ἀπερίληπτον) and no word to announce the inexpressible (ἀνεκφώνητον). Naming is impossible when we speak of an object that is infinite by nature and, therefore, "Divinity is greater and higher than names can signify."[381] Infinity and lack of any limitation is crucial here because it is the core of Gregory's counterarguments in the next passages.

These claims on the incomprehensibility and inexpressibility of the essence of God are an introduction to presenting an objection to Eunomians, which ridicules the ignorance of the Orthodox by saying: "*You worship you know not what*, if we do not know the essence of what we worship."[382] In

378 CE III, 1, 111. Ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἐπὶ πλέον παρηνέχθη τῶν προκειμένων ὁ λόγος, τοῖς ἀεὶ κατὰ τὸ ἀκόλουθον ἐφευρισκομένοις ἑπόμενος (GNO II, 41, 20–23; tr. Hall, p. 64).

379 CE III, 1, 103. ὅτι οὐκ ἔστι τὸ ἀόριστον κατὰ τὴν φύσιν ἐπινοίᾳ τινὶ ῥημάτων διαληφθῆναι (GNO II, 38, 19–21; tr. Hall, p. 63).

380 CE III, 1, 104. εἰ δὲ τὰ περὶ αὐτὸν ἀπεράτωτα, πολὺ μᾶλλον αὐτὸς ἐκεῖνος κατ' οὐσίαν ὅ τι ποτὲ καὶ ἐστὶν οὐδενὶ ὅρῳ κατ' οὐδὲν μέρος διαλαμβάνεται (GNO II, 38, 24–26).

381 CE III, 1, 105. κρεῖττόν ἐστι καὶ ὑψηλότερον τῆς ὀνομαστικῆς σημασίας τὸ θεῖον (GNO II, 39, 4–5; tr. S.G. Hall, p. 63).

382 CE III, 1, 105. Ὑμεῖς προσκυνεῖτε ὃ οὐκ οἴδατε, εἰ τὴν οὐσίαν τοῦ προσκυνουμένου οὐκ οἴδαμεν (GNO II, 39, 13–14; tr. Hall, p. 63). In his translation, Hall constantly refers to οὐσία as "being," or in this case "essential being," but since the whole argument concerns the knowledge of the essence, I changed "being" to "substance" in my quotations.

this case, the accusation is not put forth in the form of a question but rather in the form of a statement, which is the conclusion of the paradox, and it confirms that its goal was to reduce two possible answers to the claim that the Orthodox do not know what they worship. It is also noticeable that in this passage, Gregory does not quote Eunomius, because this paradox does not appear in *Liber apologeticus*, and it is unlikely that it was present in the lost fragments of *Apologia apologiae*.

In his answer, Gregory first argues that since the Orthodox know what can be known of God, they do know what they worship. He evokes the fragment of Romans 11:33 saying that according to Paul not only the judgements of God are impossible to trace, but also the paths of knowledge are inaccessible. He explains:

> "It was this, we suppose, the Apostle intended to indicate when he said that the ways which lead to the incomprehensible are 'past finding out', meaning by this expression that this knowledge is inaccessible to human thinking, and that none has yet set his mind upon such an intellectual journey, or indicated any trace or sign of an approach to apprehending the incomprehensible."[383]

The only lesson that could be learned from Paul's words is that the essence of God is beyond any human concept and knowledge. This fragment could be read as a comment on Basil's words that the only knowledge that we can have of God is His incomprehensibility, and for Gregory, the knowledge of incomprehensibility is sufficient to claim that "We know what we worship":

> "For this reason we affirm in our own selves the ridiculed doctrine, confessing ourselves not up to the knowledge which exceeds knowledge, and we say that we truly worship what we know."[384]

383 CE III, 1, 107. τοῦτο γὰρ ἡγούμεθα τὸν ἀπόστολον σημᾶναι βουλόμενον ἀνεξιχνιάστους εἰπεῖν τὰς ὁδοὺς αἳ πρὸς τὸ ἀκατάληπτον φέρουσι, δεικνύντα διὰ τῆς λέξεως ὅτι ἀνεπίβατός ἐστι λογισμοῖς ἀνθρωπίνοις ἡ γνῶσις ἐκείνη, καὶ οὔπω τις ἐπέστησεν ἑαυτοῦ τὴν διάνοιαν τῇ τοιαύτῃ τοῦ λόγου πορείᾳ, οὔτε τι ἴχνος οὔτε σημεῖον καταληπτικῆς ἐφόδου τοῖς ἀλήπτοις ἐνεσημάνατο (GNO II, 40, 1–8; tr. Hall, p. 63).

384 CE III, 1, 108. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο βεβαιοῦμεν ἐν ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς τὸ καταχλευαζόμενον δόγμα, ὁμολογοῦντες ἐλάττους εἶναι κατὰ τὴν γνῶσιν τῶν ὑπερβαινόντων τὴν γνῶσιν, καὶ προσκυνεῖν φαμεν ἀληθῶς ὅπερ οἴδαμεν (GNO II, 40, 16–20; tr. Hall, p. 64).

Gregory, like Basil, confirms that we know the things about God, that is in this case His glory and height and from that we can only deduce His unimaginable greatness,[385] while Basil rather thought that the outcome of cognition through attributes is God's existence. Gregory of Nyssa wants to say that Eunomians only thinks that they know what they worship, while they are truly ignoramuses who do not want to admit their ignorance. Therefore, the truth and worship are on the Orthodox side, and Gregory turns their own argument against them by making an exegesis of the passage from John 4:22. The Samaritans were accused by the Lord of worshiping what they do not know because they imagined God as being tied to a certain place, and residing physically on the mountain on which they had their cult:

> "The Samaritans, thinking that the Divinity was contained in some local limits, were rebuked by the words they heard: <You worship what you do not know, and the worship directed at God becomes unprofitable for you, for a god who is held to reside in a particular place is not God.>"[386]

Therefore, Gregory calls Eunomians "modern Samaritans" (νέους Σαμαρείτας), who by using the word "unbegottenness" as referring to the essence of God and enclosing it in a human concept, put a limit to it, or rather "restrict the divine substance to a sort of locality." Therefore, Eunomians, while claiming the knowledge, are ignorant because they do not know that "the infinity of God surpasses every verbal connotation or definition."[387] While the Samaritans were wrong in limiting the presence of God to one place, "new Samaritans" are wrong in limiting the essence of God to one concept of human intellect.[388]

---

385 CE III, 1, 109 (GNO II, 40, 21–22).

386 CE III, 1, 110. ὡς γὰρ τοπικῇ τινι περιγραφῇ τὸ θεῖον περιέχεσθαι Σαμαρεῖται νομίζοντες ἐπετιμήθησαν δι' ὧν ἤκουσαν ὅτι Προσκυνεῖτε ὃ οὐκ οἴδατε, καὶ ἀνόνητος γίνεται ὑμῖν ἡ λατρεία ἡ πρὸς θεὸν βλέπουσα, θεὸς γὰρ τόπῳ τινὶ καθιδρῦσθαι νομιζόμενος θεὸς οὐκ ἔστιν (GNO II, 41, 8–12; tr. Hall, p. 64).

387 CE III, 1, 110 οὕτως ἂν εἴη κυρίως καὶ πρὸς τοὺς νέους Σαμαρείτας εἰπεῖν ὅτι τῷ ὀνόματι τῆς ἀγεννησίας οἷόν τινι τόπῳ περιειλῆφθαι τὴν θείαν οὐσίαν ὑπονοοῦντες Προσκυνεῖτε ὃ οὐκ οἴδατε (GNO II, 41, 13–16; tr. Hall, p. 64).

388 *Cf.* Ch. M. Stang, *Negative Theology from Gregory of Nyssa to Dionysius the Areopagite*, in: *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. J.M. Lang, Oxford 2013, p. 169.

In their attempts to answer the sophism or paradox of Eunomians, both Basil and Gregory try to specify what kind of the knowledge of God is sufficient for the Orthodox to claim that they know the one who they worship. Those answers were coined in specific circumstances of Anomean claims that "ingeneracy" is the term which expresses and fully describes the essence of God. However, those claims were not made merely to investigate what knowledge of God human intellect can have. They were used as a tool to demonstrate that the Son of God has a different – created – essence. Although Eunomians claimed that, thanks to "ingeneracy" we can know the essence of God, they were very unclear in their explanation what exactly is the essence of God expressed by this positive feature named with a negative term. Therefore, while claiming the knowledge of the essence, they could not formulate this knowledge, since they realized that the knowledge of God cannot be explained in the mode similar to other "more comprehensible" objects. It seems that Aetius realized that human cognition has its limits, but as the analysis of *Syntagmation* has shown, he extended those limits to the unclear grasp of the essence as "ingeneracy."

In the answers given by Basil and Gregory, we can see a conviction that Eunomian claims are not only improper as leading to wrong conclusion about the nature of the Son of God, but they deemed their position as simply unsustainable and wrong. The substance of God must remain unknown since human intellect is unable to make any concept of it. However, we can also see certain gradation of the arguments in the answers of Cappadocians. Basil in a more technical way expresses that we can understand that the substance of God exists (καταληψίας ὅτι ἐστὶν ἡ οὐσία), and thus we can have a kind of the perception of incomprehensibility (ἡ αἴσθησις αὐτοῦ τῆς ἀκαταληψίας). So, the knowledge of God, which is sufficient to worship, is the recognition of the existence of God that man gains from His works. Gregory goes further by saying that the attributes of God inform us rather about Him being totally beyond our understanding, and, therefore, to know God means simply to recognize His total incomprehensibility.

4. Ousia and Energeia (Substance and Activity)

The main topic of Eunomius' *Liber apologeticus* (*Apology*) is to argue that generation of the Son of God is in fact creation, and, therefore, His substance is different from that of the Father. This thesis can be demonstrated by the fact that we can conceive the essence of God, that is we can know this essence as ingenerate. Those statements are exactly the same as what we have seen in *Syntagmation* by Aetius, but because of the dialectical austerity of this work, it remained relatively unknown, whereas the *Apology* of Aetius' disciple was commonly read as a main expression of Anomean's beliefs. Eunomius not only puts them in a more comprehensible manner, but he proposes a specific theological methodology to demonstrate his view. However, one can argue that ingeneracy is the *essence* of God only when we can show that any grasp of this essence is possible. If we cannot know the essence of God, any effective demonstration of the created nature of the Son is impossible, because there is no reason to discern whether the essences of the Father and the Son are different. Therefore, in *Liber apologeticus*, the question of the knowledge of God once again plays the leading role. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the main goal of Anomean missionary activity was to convince the Orthodox that they must know the essence to be able to worship God properly. But it must be demonstrated that such cognition is possible and how can we achieve it. Therefore, Eunomius puts forward his theological method (or methods) in his writings, and in his approach to theology, the distinction between substance and activity is of utmost importance.

4.1 Eunomius and the two ways of theology

The way of how Eunomius wants to defend the Anomean teaching is reflected in the structure of *Liber apologeticus*. The first approach makes us look at the beginning of the work, where he presents the way how he wants to make his exposition. He refers to the short Trinitarian Creed composed of three sections, which he has taken from the Fathers.[389] This

389 LA 5, 1–8 (Vaggione, p. 38).

text was based on 1 Cor. 8:6, and we know from Basil that it was presented by Arius as a token of his faith to bishop Alexander of Alexandria.[390] So he proposes, as the basis of his defence, the short text which, as Eunomius says, can be accepted by all who want to call themselves Christians.[391] His method and the structure of the work would then follow the text of the creed, which presents Eunomius' opinions and arguments regarding its contents. Therefore, the structure of *Liber apologeticus* can be presented as following the arguments on the three persons of the Trinity, with a summary and conclusion at the end.[392]

However, R.P. Vaggione notes that: "Yet, while this analysis clearly does reflect the external structure of the Apology, in other ways it is less adequate as a full expression of Eunomius' meaning."[393] In the middle of the text, we find that he introduces a method (or methods) which he wants to follow in a more technical fashion:

> "There are two roads marked out to us for the discovery of what we seek - one is that by which we examine the actual essences and with clear and unadulterated reasoning about them make a judgement on each; the other is an enquiry by means of the activities, whereby we distinguish the essence on the basis of its products and completed works - and neither of the ways mentioned is able to bring out any apparent similarity of essence."[394]

This fragment is for R.P. Vaggione a basis of recognizing the structure of Eunomius' work in a new way since it: "In some ways this might almost be taken as a summary of the contents of the treatise."[395] Therefore, the first part of the work after introduction would comprise chapters 7 to 20, which describe the first way. After that, Eunomius puts forth his explanation of

390 *Con. Eun.* I, 4 (SC 299, pp. 162–163).
391 LA 6, 1–4 (Vaggione, p. 38).
392 This structure is presented by R.P. Vaggione, Introduction in: *Eunomius*, *The Extant Works*, Oxford 1987, p. 11.
393 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
394 LA 20, 5–10. δυεῖν γὰρ ἡμῖν τετμηένων ὁδῶν τπὸς τὴν ζητουμένων εὕρεσιν, μιᾶς μὲν καθ᾿ἣν τὰς οὐσίας αὐτὰς ἐπισκοπούμενοι, καθαρῷ τῷ περὶ αὐτῶν λόγῳ τὴν ἑκάστου ποιούμεθα κρίσιν, θατέρας δὲ τῆς διὰ τῶν ἐνεργείων ὲξετάσεως, ἣν ἐκ τῶν δημιουργημάτων καὶ τῶν ἀποτελεσμάτων ιδακρίνομεν, οὐδετέραν τῶν εἰρημένων εὑρεῖν ἐμφαινομένην τὴν τῆς οὐσίας ὁμοιότητα δυνατόν (Vaggione, pp. 58–59).
395 R.P. Vaggione, Introduction, in: *Eunomius*, *The Extant Works,* Oxford 1987, p. 11.

the two ways. The second part would comprise chapters 20 to 26, which is followed by a summary, conclusion, and appendix.[396] R.P. Vaggione calls those two methods a priori and a posteriori since the first one begins with an analysis of the essences revealed by names (ἀγέννητος, γέννεημα), which leads to the understanding of the activities of the Persons, and the second one begins with the activities and concludes in the identification of essences.[397] But can we say that the second way of dividing the structure of *Liber apologeticus* was indeed more important for Eunomius himself, or he only accidentally explains his methodology, while the explanation of the simple creed is more important?

The importance of the two methods of theology for Eunomius is confirmed by his *Apologia Apologiae*, which unfortunately has been preserved only in fragments quoted by Gregory of Nyssa in his *Contra Eunomium*. Gregory also recognizes those two methods as playing the key role in Eunomius' theology, since he calls them the system, or the "technology of blasphemy" (τεχνολογία τῆς βλασφημίας).[398] A long fragment quoted by Gregory begins with the statement:

> "Our whole doctrine is summed up in the highest and principal substance, in the substance which exists through it but before all others, and in the substance which is third in terms of origin and the activity which produced it. This same order is revealed whether we consider the substances themselves or approach them through their characteristic activities."[399]

---

396 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

397 *Ibid.*, p. 11. Naming the two ways "a priori" and "a posteriori" is not very accurate. Since both substances and activities cannot be identified by experience, none of them can be truly a posteriori. Those ways correspond to what in Medieval theology was named argumentation "propter quid" – from cause to effects, or "quia" – from effects to cause.

398 CE I, 155, 1 (GNO I, 73, 16).

399 CE I, 151, 1–10. Πᾶς ὁ τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς δογμάτων συμπληροῦται λόγος ἔκ τε τῆς ἀνωτάτω καὶ κυριωτάτης οὐσίας καὶ ἐκ τῆς δι' ἐκείνην μὲν οὔσης μετ' ἐκείνην δὲ πάντων τῶν ἄλλων πρωτευούσης καὶ τρίτης γε τῆς μηδεμιᾷ μὲν τούτων συνταττομένης, ἀλλὰ τῇ μὲν διὰ τὴν αἰτίαν, τῇ δὲ διὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν καθ' ἣν γέγονεν ὑποταττομένης, συμπεριλαμβανομένων δηλαδὴ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ παντὸς λόγου συμπλήρωσιν καὶ τῶν ταῖς οὐσίαις παρεπομένων ἐνεργειῶν καὶ τῶν ταύταις προσφυῶν ὀνομάτων (GNO I, 71, 28–72, 10; tr. Hall, p. 57). As I noted above, S.G. Hall constantly translates οὐσία as "being"; in my quotation of his translations, I change "being" to "substance" for clarity of the discussed issues.

In this fragment, Eunomius once again returns to the two methods of theology, but he adds some explanations. In the following verses, he claims that each of the persons of the Trinity must be perceived as an absolutely simple substance and, therefore, their activity must be simple. He also systematically explains that their activities can be defined by the effects which they produce:

> "since the activities are defined at the same time as their works, and the works match the activities of those who effected them, there is surely every necessity both that the activities accompanying each of the substances are lesser and greater, and that some occupy the first and others the second rank, and in sum that they reach the same degree of difference as their works reach."[400]

The work (ἔργων) which reveals activity and helps to discern various types of activities, which was also mentioned in *Liber apologeticus*, now has its place in a systematic exposition of the theological method. Eunomius is convinced that it also helps to discern different levels of activities, and, therefore, it is possible recognize different substances of the Divine Persons. He also insists on the substances having primary activities, which are helpful in grading the Persons without mixing them together:

> "…should any dispute arise about the substances, to base their belief about what is being demonstrated and the resolution of disputed points on the primary activities peculiar to the substances, and to resolve any doubt about the activities with reference to the substances, and to reckon it surely more fitting and generally more accomplished to descend from primary to secondary things."[401]

This long quotation of Gregory helps us to understand that Eunomius has a great confidence in his methods of theology. As we will see, Basil's criticism primarily undermined the first way (from substance to activity), since he

400 CE I, 152, 3–10. τε καὶ νοουμένης κατὰ τὴν ἰδίαν ἀξίαν, συμπεριγραφομένων δὲ τοῖς ἔργοις τῶν ἐνεργειῶν, καὶ τῶν ἔργων ταῖς τῶν ἐργασαμένων ἐνεργείαις παραμετρουμένων, ἀνάγκη δήπου πᾶσα καὶ τὰς ἑκάστῃ τῶν οὐσιῶν ἑπομένας ἐνεργείας ἐλάττους τε καὶ μείζους εἶναι, καὶ τὰς μὲν πρώτην τὰς δὲ δευτέραν ἐπέχειν τάξιν, συνόλως τε εἰπεῖν πρὸς τοσαύτην ἐξικνεῖσθαι διαφοράν, πρὸς ὁπόσην ἂν ἐξικνῆται τὰ ἔργα· (GNO I, 72, 12–20; tr. Hall, p. 57).

401 CE I, 154, 6–13. εἰ μὲν περὶ ταῖς οὐσίαις κινοῖτό τις ἀμφισβήτησις, ἐκ τῶν πρώτων καὶ προσεχῶν ταῖς οὐσίαις ἐνεργειῶν ποιεῖσθαι τῶν δεικνυμένων τὴν πίστιν καὶ τῶν ἀμφισβητουμένων τὴν διάλυσιν, τὴν δὲ ἐπὶ ταῖς ἐνεργείαις ἀμφιβολίαν διαλύειν ἐκ τῶν οὐσιῶν, ἁρμοδιωτέραν γε μὴν καὶ τοῖς πᾶσιν ἀνυσιμωτέραν ἡγεῖσθαι τὴν ἀπὸ τῶν πρώτων ἐπὶ τὰ δεύτερα κάθοδον (GNO I, 73, 8–15; Hall, p. 58).

concentrated on the impossibility of having any knowledge of the essence based on the term "ungenerated." Therefore, in *Apologia Apologiae*, Eunomius tries somehow to combine the two ways, but he mostly underlines the second way (from activity to substance) adding to it the point of defining activities according to their effects.

Nevertheless, it can be seen that the distinction between substance and activity plays the central role in Eunomius' theology, and in obtaining the knowledge of God. Therefore, to understand better his claims about the possibility of knowing the essence of God, we must turn to the sources of the distinction between substance and activity which were available to Eunomius. It is also necessary to look for earlier uses of this distinction as a theological method.

4.2 The philosophical sources of οὐσία and ἐνέργεια

Although almost all scholars agree that Eunomius, just like Aetius, used Greek philosophy in his teaching, but there is still no clear answer to the question as to the extent of such influence. The question is even more complicated as regards the sources of Eunomius' understanding of substance and activity. The standard approach follows the accusations which were made by his opponents, who frequently pointed out that he uses the Aristotelian language and concepts.[402] Basil and Gregory frequently point out that Eunomius uses Aristotle's concepts, and Basil even recognized that at some point, he referred to *Categories*.[403] There are also similar accusations addressed against Anomeans by historians.[404] But those accusations of relying too much on Aristotle and philosophical works were made on both sides. Therefore, scholars are very cautious in admitting that Anomeans could be named Peripatetics.[405] M.R. Barnes also put in

402 M.R. Barnes presents the discussion on the sources of Eunomius' use of activity: *cf*. The Background and Use of Eunomius' Causal Language, in: *Arianism after Arius*, ed. M.R. Barnes, D.H. Williams, Edinburgh 1993, p. 222.

403 *Cf*., Basil, *Con. Eun.* I, 5, 43–45 (SC 299, pp. 172–174).

404 *Cf*., Ephphanius, *Panarion* 76. 2. 2 (GCS 37, pp. 342–343); Scocrates Scholasticus, *HE* IV, 7 (GCS NF 1, pp. 332–334).

405 M. Ludlow notes that: "…it is difficult to conclude that Aristotelianism was uniformly characteristic or distinctive of Aetius, Eunomius and their followers."

doubt Aristotle's influence on Eunomius' concept of activity by pointing out that the Anomean does not use ἐνέργεια with the related term δύναμις, and, therefore, the sources of his theology must be looked for elsewhere.[406] As we will see below, the use of ἐνέργεια in the context of capacity is only one of many which the Stagirite exploits in his writings. I would like to underline that the term was coined by Aristotle, and it was used both in philosophical and Christian writings. Its meaning was developing, but ἐνέργεια was seen as a term which was especially well fitted in the descriptions of the actions of God.

4.2.1 Aristotle – the origins of ἐνέργεια

Although similar concepts can be found in earlier writings, the word ἐνέργεια appears for the first time in the writings of Aristotle, who uses it very frequently.[407] Aristotle himself discusses the etymology of the word maintaining that it is derived from "deed" or "thing done" (τὸ ἔργον).[408] Although the term is new, the combination of *en* with *ergon* can be found in earlier Greek texts. The meaning of it can be explained by the adjective *energos* which means "active, effective" or the verb *energein* meaning "to be active or effective to operate." Therefore, the meaning of the term would be "activity, operation or effectiveness."[409] But Aristotle also expresses difficulties in understanding this new concept, which can be best seen in his remarks on its definition. In a fragment from *Metaphysics Theta*, he says:

Contra Eunomium III – Who Is Eunomius? in: *Gregory of Nyssa*, *Contra Eunomium III*, ed. J. Leemans, M. Cassin, Leiden, Boston 2014, p. 456.

406 *Cf.* M.R. Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

407 In his writings, he uses this term 670 times, *cf.* J.-C. Larchet, *La théologie des énergies divines*, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

408 *Met.* IX, 8, 1050 a, 22–23. ἡ δὲ ἐνέργεια τὸ ἔργον, διὸ καὶ τοὔνομα ἐνέργεια λέγεται κατὰ τὸ ἔργον καὶ συντείνει πρὸς τὴν ἐντελέχειαν.

409 *Cf.* D. Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West. op. cit.*, p. 1. J. Beere points out that *energeia* is "merely ans abstract noun form a familiar adjective (*energos*)", *cf.* J. Beere, *Doing and being*, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

“What we want to say is clear on the basis of the particular cases, by induction, and one should not seek a definition of everything, but should also comprehend some things by analogy.”[410]

As J. Beere suggests analogy is the key concept for the understanding of the term. He thinks that Aristotle simultaneously intended to exclude ambiguity from the understanding of what ἐνέργεια is and preserve various cases which this term covers. Therefore, the most suitable approach to the understanding of the term should not exclude any cases and examples which Aristotle gives to describe ἐνέργεια in his works.[411] However, we must remember that he focuses on the meaning of the term in *Metaphysics*.

In his seminal work on the topic, D. Bradshaw proposes a different approach. He wants to cover various cases of using the term by tracing the development of this concept in the works of Aristotle.[412] His method leads him to present several modes of understanding ἐνέργεια in Aristotle: as an exercise of capacity, in its distinction with motion, as actuality, and most of all its use in describing the activity of the Prime Mover. This method, although it relies on the uncertain time sequence of the *Corpus Aristotelicum*, is especially useful because it is able to show the development of the understanding of the term. It seems that both of those two approaches are profitable, but for the purpose of our study, we shall concentrate on explaining the meaning of ἐνέργεια in the context of its application to the activity of God.

The earliest meaning of ἐνέργεια in the Aristotelian corpus is the exercise of capacity. Aristotle develops here the concepts of Plato, who expressed similar ideas without using the term ἐνέργεια.[413] We can observe such understanding in the preserved fragments of *Protrepticus*, which seems to be very important to show the use of the term by Eunomius. When explaining the body and soul as parts of a human being and the operations proper of those parts, he says:

---

410 *Met.* IX, 6 1048 a, 35–37. τὸ δὲ ἐνεργείᾳ. δῆλον δ’ ἐπὶ τῶν καθ’ ἕκαστα τῇ ἐπαγωγῇ ὃ βουλόμεθα λέγειν, καὶ οὐ δεῖ παντὸς ὅρον ζητεῖν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ἀνάλογον συνορᾶν (tr. Barnes).

411 *Cf.* J. Beere, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

412 *Cf.* D. Bradshaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–2.

413 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

> "that which is composite and divisible into parts has several different activities, but that which is by nature simple and whose being does not consist in relation to something else must have only one excellence, in the full sense of the word."[414]

As D. Bradshaw suggests, if ἐνέργεια simply meant activity, it would be odd to correlate the number of parts with the number of activities.[415] The term also must mean the exercise of capacity because in the next part of this fragment, the term is linked with the possession of faculties (δύναμις).[416] In *Protrepticus*, we can also observe the use of expressions κατὰ δύναμιν and κατ᾽ἐνέργειαν,[417] which is a symptom of the development of the concept in the context of the levels of being. Aristotle explains that the man who exercises the capacity of rational thinking "lives more" than the one who simply possesses it, and exercising capacity rather than having it is described as "true being" (ὅπερ εἶναι).[418] Aristotle expands this use of the two senses of such words as "live," "perceive," and "know" in his other works.[419] Using his example of the knower, he notes that calling man a potential knower is ambiguous. The first kind of being a potential knower means that man can think because of what he is, he has such capacity as a human being, or as Aristotle puts it "the man falls within the class of beings that know or have knowledge."[420] In the second meaning, man can be called as capable of thinking only when he has knowledge (e.g., of grammar) and can "realize this knowledge in actual knowing at will."[421] Only man who possesses knowledge in the second sense can fully realize this knowledge in the state of actual thinking.[422] In the following analysis of a change from the state of capacity to the actual use of knowledge, ἐνέργεια is understood as the fulfilment of man's nature and the path to a fuller reality. As D. Bradshaw

---

414 *Protrep*. 64, 1–3, Τοῦ μὲν οὖν συνθέτου καὶ μεριστοῦ πλείους καὶ διάφοροί εἰσιν ἐνέργειαι, τοῦ δὲ τὴν φύσιν ἁπλοῦ καὶ μὴ πρός τι τὴν οὐσίαν ἔχοντος μίαν ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι τὴν καθ' αὑτὸ κυρίως ἀρετήν (tr. Barnes).
415 *Cf*. D. Bradshaw, *op. cit*., p. 4.
416 *Protrep*. 64, 5–7.
417 *Protrep*. 79, 1–2.
418 *Protrep*. 86, 1–4.
419 *Cf*. D. Bradshaw, *op. cit*., pp. 5–6.
420 *De anima* II, 5, 417 a, 24 (tr. Barnes).
421 *De anima* II, 5, 417 a, 27–28. ὁ δ' ὅτι βουληθεὶς δυνατὸς θεωρεῖν (tr. Barnes).
422 *Cf*. J. Beere, *op. cit*., p. 157.

notes, the transition from the second to the third step does not require any involvement of an external agent, but it happens of itself. He also points out that in *Physics* VII, 4 Aristotle uses ἐνέργεια to explain the proper behaviour of the elements such as water. The term is used to describe simply being in a place according to the natural features of the element, or even having a certain dimension according to certain quantity.[423]

At this point, we can note that ἐνέργεια already means more than simply the exercise of capacity. As it also describes the levels of reality, it is intrinsically linked not only with acting, but also with the life and being of certain things. But to understand Aristotle's conception, it is necessary to have a closer look at the relation of ἐνεργέια to change (κίνησις), because he himself notes "For it seems that actuality (ἐνέργεια) most of all has its being qua change."[424] This problem is also very important because the generation of the Son in Eunomius is also described as motion.

Aristotle discusses the relation of ἐνέργεια to change in the famous though difficult fragment of the sixth chapter of *Metaphysics theta*.[425] The main problem in this distinction is the relation of both concepts to the end. There are two kinds of action: the first one is change and the second one is ἐνέργεια. Change is the kind of movement which does not have its limit in itself. The process of building is incomplete until it reaches the end (a house is built). On the other hand, ἐνέργεια is the kind of action which has its end in itself and is complete. Therefore, Aristotle explains:

> "Of these then [it is necessary] to call some changes, and others actualities (ἐνέργειαι). For all change is incomplete, thinning, learning, walking, house building; these are changes and surely incomplete. For it is not at the same time that one is walking and has walked, nor building a house and having built a house, nor coming to be and having come to be, nor being changed and having been changed, but these are different, and so too if something is bringing about change and has brought about change. But the same thing at the same time has seen and is seeing

423 *Cf.* D. Bradshaw, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
424 *Met.* 1047 a, 32. ἡ ἐνέργεια μάλιστα ἡ κίνησις εἶναι (tr. Makin, p. 4).
425 This fragment (1048 b, 18–35) was the subject of discussions which are referred by J. Beere, *op. cit.* pp. 221–230. It is interesting that this is the only fragment where Aristotle explicitly contrasts the terms "energeia" and "change." Although J. Beere thinks that its contents should not be treated as the standard Aristotelian doctrine (*cf. ibid.*, p. 230), it seems to be useful for the purpose of understanding the claims of his successors including Eunomius.

> and is thinking and has thought. So I call such a thing an actuality (ἐνέργειαν), but that thing a change."[426]

Although some actions are incomplete, they can be called actions in a way, but properly speaking, ἐνέργεια is the kind of action which is complete and has its end in itself. Therefore, change stops when it reaches the end, but it is not necessary for ἐνέργεια to end.[427] To explain this further, D. Bradshaw tries to add to the remarks from *Metaphysics* the notions from *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle discusses the nature of pleasure. Although they do not contain the distinction from *Metaphysics*, he argues that pleasure and ἐνέργεια are intrinsically linked. Therefore, the distinction between change and pleasure seems to be an addition to earlier observations.[428] Aristotle rejects the notion that pleasure is a movement, because:

> "But the form of pleasure is complete at any given moment, so it is clear that it is different from a process, and that pleasure is something whole and complete. This would seem true also from the fact that a process must take time, whereas being pleased does not, since what takes place at the present moment is a kind of whole."[429]

This fragment allows us to admit that ἐνέργεια is complete at any moment and does not take place in time, and as D. Bradshaw suggests, it is characterized not only by "its intrinsic atemporality," but also "its teleological self-closure."[430]

---

426 *Met.* 1048 b, 28–35. τούτων δὴ <δεῖ> τὰς μὲν κινήσεις λέγειν, τὰς δ' ἐνεργείας. πᾶσα γὰρ κίνησις ἀτελής, ἰσχνασία μάθησις βάδισις οἰκοδόμησις· αὗται δὴ κινήσεις, καὶ ἀτελεῖς γε. οὐ γὰρ ἅμα βαδίζει καὶ βεβάδικεν, οὐδ' οἰκοδομεῖ καὶ ᾠκοδόμηκεν, οὐδὲ γίγνεται καὶ γέγονεν ἢ κινεῖται καὶ κεκίνηται, ἀλλ' ἕτερον, καὶ κινεῖ καὶ κεκίνηκεν· ἑώρακε δὲ καὶ ὁρᾷ ἅμα τὸ αὐτό, καὶ νοεῖ καὶ νενόηκεν. τὴν μὲν οὖν τοιαύτην ἐνέργειαν λέγω, ἐκείνην δὲ κίνησιν.

427 *Cf.* J. Beere, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

428 J. Bradshaw quotes Aristotle saying that pleasure "completes the activity" (1174 b, 23), *cf. op. cit.*, p. 9. The analysis of *Nicomachean Ethics* allows him to make a table of the main differences between change and ἐνέργεια, *cf.* p. 10.

429 *Eth. Nic.* X, 4, 1147 b, 5–9 τῆς ἡδονῆς δ' ἐν ὁτῳοῦν χρόνῳ τέλειον τὸ εἶδος. δῆλον οὖν ὡς ἕτεραί τ' ἂν εἶεν ἀλλήλων, καὶ τῶν ὅλων τι καὶ τελείων ἡ ἡδονή. δόξειε δ' ἂν τοῦτο καὶ ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ἐνδέχεσθαι κινεῖσθαι μὴ ἐν χρόνῳ, ἥδεσθαι δέ· τὸ γὰρ ἐν τῷ νῦν ὅλον τι (tr. R. Crisp, p. 188).

430 D. Bradshaw, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

Until now, ἐνέργεια was presented as the type of exercising capacity which has a specific character. For the purpose of our study, the most important use of the term proposed by Aristotle is related to substance (οὐσία). But to understand better the meaning of this term, we must clarify the meaning of ἐνέργεια in its relation to actuality (ἐντελέχεια). This second term was also coined by Aristotle and is usually understood as "having completeness," "being fully real," or "actuality." The first term (ἐνέργεια) also has that meaning, but Aristotle much more often uses ἐντελέχεια to express that kind of existence, than exercise of capacity,[431] so actuality could be understood as having a more abstract sense.

In the eighth chapter of *Metaphysics Theta*, Aristotle argues for the priority of actuality to potency in the aspects of definition, time, and substance. Although Aristotle does not define what does he exactly mean by "prior in substance," his explanations of the matter in this fragment suggest that he means "that a thing is prior in substance when it characterizes a more fully realized stage of natural development."[432] He gives examples of the man who is prior to the boy and explains that:

> "everything that comes to be proceeds to an origin and an end (for that for the sake of which is an origin, and the coming to be is for the sake of the end), and the actuality is an end (τέλος δ' ἡ ἐνέργεια), and the potentiality is acquired for the sake of this."[433]

But priority of ἐνέργεια could be seen much better in the case of eternal beings. Aristotle explains:

> "But indeed actuality is prior in a more proper way too. For eternal things are prior in substance to perishable things, and nothing eternal is potentially."[434]

Aristotle talks here about heavenly bodies, and he clarifies in the next fragment of this passage that they do not have potency of non-existence, and the only potency they have is the potency to change place (from-where to

---

431 Good example is *Met.* V, 7, 1017 a, 35-b, 2: "Again, 'being' (τὸ εἶναι) and 'that which is' (τὸ ὄν) mean some of the things we mentioned, 'are' potentially (δυνάμει) and others in complete reality" (ἐντελέχεια) (tr. Barnes).

432 *Cf.* D. Bradshaw, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

433 *Met.* IX, 8, 1050 a, 6–9 (tr. Makin, p. 11).

434 *Met.* IX, 8, 1050 b, 6–8. - ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ κυριωτέρως· τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἀΐδια πρότερα τῇ οὐσίᾳ τῶν φθαρτῶν, ἔστι δ' οὐθὲν δυνάμει ἀΐδιον (tr. Makin, p. 12).

to-where). That is why the Sun and the stars are always acting, and there is no fear that they would stop.[435] Eternal activity of the movement of heavenly bodies is simply the state of their being; such ἐνέργεια is in their nature, or is in their nature *per se*. That is also why perishable things imitate them when their activity is intrinsically tied to their nature, like fire which cannot exist without burning.[436] Therefore, we can assume that there are substances which cannot exist without their proper ἐνέργειαι, and when we apply this to eternal beings, their eternal existence is always realized by their activities. Such a description of activity of eternal beings is even more telling when we remember what has been previously said about ἐνέργεια as not happening in time and having its own end in itself. That is why it is also perfectly fitting to describe the actuality of the Prime Mover, which is pure and subsistent actuality.

This can be seen already in the famous demonstration of the necessity of existence of the Prime Mover, which we find in *Metaphysics* XII, 6, which Aristotle ends with the following conclusion:

> "Further, even if it acts, this will not be enough, if its substance is potency; for there will not be eternal movement, since that which is potentially may possibly not be. There must, then, be such a principle, whose very substance is actuality."[437]

Therefore, as the Prime Mover is pure actuality, it cannot undergo any change because he has no potency. In the next chapter, Aristotle explains that such "primary simple substance existing in actuality" is also the primary object of thought and desire.[438] D. Bradshaw draws attention to the shift which happens in this place of the discourse. Aristotle changes here the perspective from the Prime Mover as the primal object of desire to "what it is like to be a Prime Mover."[439] He starts to treat the Prime Mover as a live being whose

---

435 *Met.* IX, 8, 1050 b, 22–24. διὸ ἀεὶ ἐνεργεῖ ἥλιος καὶ ἄστρα καὶ ὅλος ὁ οὐρανός, καὶ οὐ φοβερὸν μή ποτε στῇ, ὃ φοβοῦνται οἱ περὶ φύσεως. οὐδὲ κάμνει τοῦτο δρῶντα· (tr. Makin, p. 12).

436 *Cf. Met.* IX, 8, 1050 b, 29–32.

437 *Met.* XII, 6, 1071 b, 17–20. ἔτι οὐδ' εἰ ἐνεργήσει, ἡ δ' οὐσία αὐτῆς δύναμις· οὐ γὰρ ἔσται κίνησις ἀΐδιος· ἐνδέχεται γὰρ τὸ δυνάμει ὂν μὴ εἶναι. δεῖ ἄρα εἶναι ἀρχὴν τοιαύτην ἧς ἡ οὐσία ἐνέργεια (tr. Barnes).

438 *Met.* XII, 7, 1072 a, 31–32. ἡ οὐσία πρώτη, καὶ ταύτης ἡ ἁπλῆ καὶ κατ' ἐνέργειαν.

439 D. Bradshaw, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

life is activity which is at the same time the supreme pleasure.[440] His life also realizes in thinking, since he is the thought which thinks of itself. In thinking, he does not pass from potency to act, because he does not receive the object of thought, but rather possesses it; therefore, he is "active when it possesses this object (ἐνεργεῖ δὲ ἔχων)."[441] As D. Bradshaw observes, it's only after having admitted that the Prime Mover is a live being that Aristotle begins to refer to it as God,[442] whose life is the supreme activity.[443]

Up to this point, we can see clearly that God, described as being the activity of the self-thinking thought and also being the actuality in the fullest sense, is the best example of activity which does not involve any opposition to potency. Therefore, M.R. Barnes' argument on seeking the sources of Eunomius' distinction cannot be true.[444] He certainly did not share the Aristotelian view of activity, and – as we shall see – he rejected some of his opinions, but the tradition of describing the operation of God as ἐνέργεια certainly dates back to Aristotle. Not only did he coin the term himself, but also made clear that ἐνέργεια is the best expression to describe the supreme reality in its existence and its life and his is followers, pagan as well as Christian, will continue to use it when speaking of God.

4.2.2 The use of ἐνέργεια in Middle-Platonism and Plotinus

Although there is some confusion about accessibility of Aristotle's works in the Hellenistic period and in the 1st century after Christ, the teaching

---

440 *Met.* XII, 7, 1072 b, 14–16. "And it is the life such as best which we enjoy, and enjoy for but the short time (for it is ever in this state, which we cannot be) since its actuality is also pleasure (ἐπεὶ καὶ ἡδονὴ ἡ ἐνέργεια τούτου)" (tr. Barnes).

441 *Cf. Met.* XII, 7, 1072 b, 19–20.

442 *Cf.* D. Bradshaw, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

443 *Cf. Met.* XII, 7, 1072 b, 26–29. ἔχει δὲ ὧδε. καὶ ζωὴ δέ γε ὑπάρχει· ἡ γὰρ νοῦ ἐνέργεια ζωή, ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἡ ἐνέργεια· ἐνέργεια δὲ ἡ καθ' αὑτὴν ἐκείνου ζωὴ ἀρίστη καὶ ἀΐδιος. φαμὲν δὴ τὸν θεὸν εἶναι ζῷον ἀΐδιον ἄριστον, ὥστε ζωὴ καὶ αἰὼν συνεχὴς καὶ ἀΐδιος ὑπάρχει τῷ θεῷ· τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ θεός. "And life also belongs to God; for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God's essential actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God" (tr. Barnes).

444 *Cf.* M.R. Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

on ἐνέργεια was passed on and developed with respect to the exercise of capacity as well as the description of the perfect activity of God.[445] The most interesting, however, seems to be the continuation and evolution of Aristotle's thought which occurred in Middle-Platonism, especially in Alexandria, and the most interesting character in this tradition – Philo. In his writings, we find probably the first use of this term in the context of the knowledge of God.[446] Although we have already discussed his claims on God's incomprehensibility in one of the previous chapters, but here we have to say more about the relation of incomprehensibility to the activities of God.

He frequently uses ἐνέργεια in the sense of "activity" or "characteristic activity," especially when he describes the operations of the mind, senses, and parts of the body.[447] But Philo is especially important because he uses the term for the first time to describe creative activity of God. For him, the perpetual activity of God is rather restful than laborious, which is why he describes His rest after six days of creation as ἐνέργεια.[448] Since the activity of God is perpetual, he eternally creates the world by thinking the ideas. Philo also draws a borderline between creations and the Creator by claiming that since the fundamental feature of God is his activity, we cannot think that activity is also a characteristic of any created being. While God acts, creations are rather receptive and passive.[449] Therefore, we can assume that

---

445 D. Bradshaw refers its development in various fields of literary criticism, historical writing, religious thought, and science. *Cf. op. cit.*, pp. 45–58.

446 It is not easy to find the proper place for Philo in the historical context of the development of ἐνέργεια, but since he was used as a source by both Non-Christian and Christian writers, as we will see below, it seems better to show his teaching in the context of Middle-Platonism.

447 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

448 *Cher.* 87–90. "Moses does not give the name of rest to mere inactivity. The cause of all things is by its nature active (δραστήριον); it never ceases to make all that is best and most beautiful. God's rest is rather a working (ἐνέργειαν) with absolute ease, without toil and without suffering…" (Colson/Whitaker, vol. 2, pp. 61–64).

449 *Cher.* 77–78. "What deadlier foe to the soul can there be than he who in his vainglory claims to himself that which belongs to God alone? For it belongs to God to act (ποιεῖν), and this we may not ascribe to any created being. What belongs to the created is to suffer (πάσχειν), and he who accepts this from the first, as a necessity inseparable from his lot, will bear with patience what befalls him, however grievous it may be" (Colson/Whitaker, vol. 2, pp. 54–55).

for Philo, the activity of God is not constrained to self-thinking, but His being-in-energeia means that he is even more understood as pure activity than as pure actuality. This allows Philo to treat the activity of God in a personal way, which is certainly in accord with how God is presented in the Holy Scripture.[450]

Such radical statements on the activity of God make all activities in the created world the activity of the Creator present in His works. That certainly opens up a new possibility of obtaining the knowledge of Him. In Philo's doctrine, we observe probably the first attempt to turn the activities of God into path to know the Creator. But Philo makes a clear distinction between God's essence and His activities. While His activities, since they are present in the world, are knowable, He remains totally beyond apprehension (αὐτὸς δὲ μόνος ἀκατάληπτος).[451] The only knowledge which man can obtain of God is to know that He is:

> "It is quite enough for a man's reasoning faculty to advance as far as to learn that the cause of the universe is and subsists. To be anxious to continue his course yet further, and inquire about essence or quality in God, is a folly fit for the world's childhood."[452]

Philo insists that only the existence of God can be known, and the knowledge which we have on His activities does not allow us to know even His Powers through which He acts:

> "But while in their essence (κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν) they [Powers] are beyond your apprehension (ἀκατάληπτοι), they nevertheless present to your sight a sort of impress and copy of their activity (ἐνεργείας). You men have for your use seals which when brought into contact with wax or similar material stamp on them any number of impressions while they themselves are not docked in any part thereby, but remain as they were. Such you must conceive my Powers to be, supplying quality and shape to things which lack either and yet changing or lessening nothing of their eternal nature. Some among you call them not inaptly Forms or Ideas (ἰδέας), since they bring form into everything that is, giving order to the disordered, limit to the unlimited, bounds to the unbounded, shape to the shapeless, and in general

450 *Cf.* D. Bradshaw, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
451 *Cf. Post.* 169 (Colson/Whitaker, vol. 2, pp. 428–429).
452 *Post.* 168–169. ἀνθρώπου γὰρ ἐξαρκεῖ λογισμῷ μέχρι τοῦ καταμαθεῖν ὅτι ἔστι τε καὶ ὑπάρχει τὸ τῶν ὅλων αἴτιον προελθεῖν· περαιτέρω δὲ σπουδάζειν τρέπεσθαι, ὡς περὶ οὐσίας ἢ ποιότητος ζητεῖν, ὠγύγιός τις ἠλιθιότης (Colson/Whitaker, vol. 2, pp. 428–429).

> changing the worse to something better. Do not, then, hope ever to be able to apprehend Me or any of my Powers in our essence (κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν). But I readily and with goodwill admit you to a share of what is attainable."[453]

Philo tells us that Powers are the same as ideas or forms in the mind of God, and although they should be known, because they are principles of order, limit, shape, etc., he insists that they are unconceivable. Like God, they are limitless and, therefore, cannot be grasped by human intellect.[454] This is the statement which seems to be against the entire Platonic tradition since for Plato, forms are the primary objects of intellectual cognition. But here, ideas are active powers not passive objects, and therefore each of them can have their own ἐνέργεια. Those activities leave behind the effects of their actions, and those are the only things which we can know. But Philo's words also mean that any reasoning based on those effects cannot lead us to the knowledge of the Powers. We can clearly see only general effects of their actions. So the only possible conclusion is that there must have been some activities which caused this effect, but in our reasoning, we can barely go further. The second step in this reasoning can only give us a hint that there are some Ideas or Powers, which are the source of order, shape, and "general changing the worse to something better," but that is all. This may give us only a conviction that someone who has those Powers must exist.

Jean-Claude Larchet sees Philo as the main source of the distinction between οὐσία and ἐνέργεια by later Christian writers as a way to secure

453 *Spec.* I, 47–49. πεφυκυῖαι δ' ἀκατάληπτοι κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν ὅμως παραφαίνουσιν ἐκμαγεῖόν τι καὶ ἀπεικόνισμα τῆς ἑαυτῶν ἐνεργείας· οἷαι αἱ παρ' ὑμῖν σφραγῖδες - ὅταν <γὰρ> προσενεχθῇ κηρὸς ἤ τις ὁμοιότροπος ὕλη, μυρίους ὅσους τύπους ἐναπομάττονται, μηδὲν ἀκρωτηριασθεῖσαι μέρος, | ἀλλ' ἐν ὁμοίῳ μένουσαι-, τοιαύτας ὑποληπτέον καὶ τὰς περὶ ἐμὲ δυνάμεις περιποιούσας ἀποίοις ποιότητας καὶ μορφὰς ἀμόρφοις καὶ μηδὲν τῆς ἀιδίου φύσεως μήτ' ἀλλαττομένας μήτε μειουμένας. ὀνομάζουσι δ' αὐτὰς οὐκ ἀπὸ σκοποῦ τινες τῶν παρ' ὑμῖν ἰδέας, ἐπειδὴ ἕκαστα τῶν ὄντων εἰδοποιοῦσι τὰ ἄτακτα τάττουσαι καὶ τὰ ἄπειρα καὶ ἀόριστα καὶ ἀσχημάτιστα περατοῦσαι καὶ περιορίζουσαι καὶ σχηματίζουσαι καὶ συνόλως τὸ χεῖρον εἰς τὸ ἄμεινον μεθαρμοζόμεναι. μήτ' οὖν ἐμὲ μήτε τινὰ τῶν ἐμῶν δυνάμεων κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν ἐλπίσῃς ποτὲ δυνήσεσθαι καταλαβεῖν. τῶν δ' ἐφικτῶν, ὡς εἶπον, ἑτοίμως καὶ προθύμως μεταδίδωμι (Colson/Whitaker, vol. 7, pp. 124–127).

454 *Cf.* J.-C. Larchet, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

incomprehensibility of God.[455] So it is remarkable that for Eunomius, this distinction can serve a completely different purpose, namely to demonstrate that the knowledge of the essence of God is possible. But Philo's teaching of the knowledge of the activities of God is a source not only for the Fathers. Most of all, it also inseminated Middle-Platonic thinkers, who treat this Aristotelian concept as an inherent part of their doctrines. Although it is not widely discussed, it is still present in the preserved writings of such philosophers as Numenius, Alcinous, and Alexander of Aphrodisias, and it evolves alongside new elements in the understanding of the nature of the Deity.[456] It seems that the most important moment of this development may be observed in Alexander of Aphrodisias, who identified the Aristotelian Prime Mover with active intellect, but also treated such conceived Deity as creative in his process of thinking.[457] Those additions, however, seem of little importance as compared to the doctrine of Plotinus, where ἐνέργεια occupies a prominent place in the understanding of the creative activity of intellectual hypostases.

To understand how the Aristotelian concept was incorporated in Plotinus' system, we must first have a look at his criticism of Aristotle's categories of being. Plotinus discusses the kinds of being in the first three treatises of the sixth Ennead. The main problem is whether the set of the kinds of being (substance and nine accidents) from Aristotle's *Categories* can be applied to the intellectual world. He reports that there are different opinions regarding the kinds of being, but the main question is: "Are the ten [categories of Aristotle] found alike in the Intellectual and in Sensible realms? Or are all found in the Sensible and some only in the Intellectual?"[458] In the Aristotelian view, the kinds of being imply a division between substance and properties, since property is an "external" addition to substance of which it is predicated. Therefore, they could not be perceived as simple genera in the intellectual world where the primary characteristic of substance is its

---

455 *Cf. ibid.*, pp. 79–80.

456 The understanding of ἐνέργεια in Middle-Platonism is discussed broadly by D. Bradshaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 64–72, and J.-C. Larchet, *op. cit.*, pp. 38–42.

457 *Cf.* D. Bradshaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 71–72.

458 *Enn.* VI, 1, 1, 19–20. μᾶλλον δὲ ἐκεῖνο πρῶτον ἐρωτητέον, πότερα ὁμοίως ἔν τε τοῖς νοητοῖς ἔν τε τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς τὰ δέκα (Henry/Schwyzer, vol. 3, p. 3; tr. MacKenna/Page, p. 252).

higher degree of integrity and oneness. That is why, the genera of being in the intellectual world are rather those which can be found in Plato's *Sophists* (being, motion, stability <or rest, or remaining>, identity and difference).[459] A.C. Lloyd points out that this is not the case that Aristotle's genera must have a different meaning in the intellectual world, they "have no place in the intelligible world."[460] On the contrary, the simple genera of Plato are proper in the intellectual world because, while they describe the substance, they are not its properties. What are they then? A.C. Lloyd answers: "They are not attributes of substance/being – otherwise it would not be simple – but activities of it."[461] We can see that A.C. Lloyd is not exactly right when he says that Aristotle's genera have no place in the intellectual world at all. Since Plato's genera are activities, the only exception seems to be activity itself, but it is clear that it must be predicated differently on the two levels of reality. While in sensual world, it can be perceived as a property, in the intellectual one, it is identical with substance. A crucial question here is how does Plotinus understand the simple genera of Plato as activities.

It is easy to understand movement as activity, but what about such genera as identity, difference, remaining,[462] and especially being? A.C. Lloyd explains once again: "Plotinus, like Aristotle, is conscious that οὐσία is a nominal form of the verb 'to be' and primarily in its existential sense."[463] Therefore, here we should rather understand substance in the existential sense: the first internal activity of substance is its being substance. We can apply this explanation to other genres: identity is being-in-identity (or existing in identity), difference is being-in-difference, and so on. It is essential that those genera are simply what substance is in itself; they do not add anything to substance. In his criticism of Aristotle's categories, Plotinus explains that when one predicates a property, which makes substance different, he adds something to it and it is completed "from the outside."

459 *Soph*. 236 D-264 B.

460 A.C. Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism*, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

461 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

462 The terms μονή or στάσις are often translated as stability, or rest, but I prefer Lloyd's term 'remaining' because it better shows how it could be perceived as activity.

463 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

Properties which make substance different are mostly qualities, and in his discussion of these qualities, Plotinus says:

> "Nevertheless, we ventured to assure elsewhere that while the complements of substance are only by analogy called qualities, yet accessions of external origin and subsequent to Substance are really qualities; that, further, the properties which inhere in substances are their activities (ἐνεργείας αὐτῶν), while those which are subsequent are merely modifications (αὐτὰς ἤδη πάθη): we now affirm that the attributes of the particular substance are never complementary to the substance [as such]; an accession of substance does not come to the substance of man *qua man*; he is, on the contrary, substance in higher degree before he arrives at differentiation, just as he is already <living being> before he passes into the rational species."[464]

The substance of the intellectual realm possesses all qualities, because they are what it is, and, therefore, we can truly say that it has those qualities, but they do not make it substance by defining it. Plotinus explicitly says that those qualities are activities of substance, while in the sensual world they are rather passive. We can understand what Plotinus means that by referring to his notion of the procession of intellectual hypostases, which occurs not by diminishing a higher entity, but rather by the division and multiplication of something which hypostasis already possesses in a simpler and undivided way. According to this mode, we can also explain "remaining" as an activity, which is somehow hidden in the higher substance, but becomes distinct in the lower one. Therefore "what remains is not something alongside the internal activity: it is that activity."[465] Plotinus states it very clearly that all supreme genres of Plato could be ascribed to substance without qualifying or particularizing it:

> "If motion is the act (ἐνέργεια) of substance, and being and the primaries (τὰ πρῶτα) in general are its act, then motion is not the accidental attribute (συμβεβηκός): as the act of what is necessarily actual [when necessarily involves act], it is no longer

464 *Enn.* VI, 2, 14, 18–22. Καίτοι ἐν ἄλλοις ἠξιοῦμεν τὰ μὲν τῆς οὐσίας συμπληρωτικὰ ὁμωνύμως ποιὰ εἶναι, τὰ δ' ἔξωθεν μετὰ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑπάρχοντα ποιά, καὶ τὰ μὲν ἐν ταῖς οὐσίαις ἐνεργείας αὐτῶν, τὰ δὲ μετ' αὐτὰς ἤδη πάθη. Νῦν δὲ λέγομεν οὐκ οὐσίας ὅλως εἶναι συμπληρωτικὰ τὰ τῆς τινὸς οὐσίας· οὐ γὰρ οὐσίας προσθήκη γίνεται τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ καθὸ ἄνθρωπος εἰς οὐσίαν· ἀλλ' ἔστιν οὐσία ἄνωθεν, πρὶν ἐπὶ τὴν διαφορὰν ἐλθεῖν, ὥσπερ καὶ ζῷον ἤδη, πρὶν ἐπὶ τὸ λογικὸν ἥκειν (Henry/Schwyzer, vol. 3, p. 62; tr. MacKenna/Page, pp. 276–277).

465 A.C. Lloyd, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

> to be considered as complement of substance but substance itself. For this reason, then, it has not been assigned to a posterior class, or referred to quality, but has been made contemporary with the being. The truth is not that being first is and then takes motion, first is and acquires stability [remaining]: neither stability nor motion is a mere modification of being. Similarly, identity and difference are not later additions: being did not grow into plurality; its very unity was plurality; but plurality implies difference, and unity-in-plurality involves identity. Substance [real Being] requires no more than these five constituents; but when we turn to lower sphere, we find other principles giving rise no longer to substance (as such) but to quantitative substance and qualitative: these other principles can be regarded as genera but not primary genera."[466]

We can imagine that here Plotinus simply fully draws the conclusions of what Aristotle claimed on the activity of motion/change as not occurring in time and having its own end in itself. In the intellectual reality Aristotle's genera are sufficient to describe the constitutive elements of substance. It is simply substance, but in the sensual realm, it is no longer substance as such, but rather substance with the property of quality or quantity. Such perception of the activity of intellectual substances tells us much about how Plotinus understood the intellectual cosmos. Since even remaining is a kind of activity, this is not a static place, but rather the world of unending dynamism. This can also be observed in the second aspect in which Plotinus describes activity. This is no longer the aspect of "activity of existence," but rather activity which is creative.

This creative aspect of the understanding of activity is presented in the fourth chapter of the fifth Ennead. In this treaty, he wanted to explain how the Intellect (νοῦς) comes from the One. Plotinus starts with elaborating on natural activity which is present in the Cosmos. To show the productive nature of the One, Plotinus claims that in every productive activity which

---

466 *Enn.* VI, 2, 15, 6–18 εἰ γὰρ ἡ κίνησις ἐνέργειά ἐστιν αὐτῆς, ἐνεργείᾳ δὲ τὸ ὂν καὶ ὅλως τὰ πρῶτα, οὐκ ἂν συμβεβηκὸς εἴη ἡ κίνησις, ἀλλ’ ἐνέργεια οὖσα ἐνεργείᾳ ὄντος οὐδ’ ἂν συμπληρωτικὸν ἔτι λέγοιτο, ἀλλ’ αὐτή· ὥστε οὐκ ἐμβέβηκεν εἰς ὕστερόν τι οὐδ’ εἰς ποιότητα, ἀλλ’ εἰς τὸ ἅμα τέτακται. Οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ὄν, εἶτα κεκίνηται, οὐδὲ ἔστιν ὄν, εἶτα ἔστη· οὐδὲ πάθος ἡ στάσις· καὶ ταὐτὸν δὲ καὶ θάτερον οὐχ ὕστερα, ὅτι μὴ ὕστερον ἐγένετο πολλά, ἀλλ’ ἦν ὅπερ ἦν ἓν πολλά· εἰ δὲ πολλά, καὶ ἑτερότης, καὶ εἰ ἓν πολλά, καὶ ταὐτότης. Καὶ ταῦτα εἰς τὴν οὐσίαν ἀρκεῖ· ὅταν δὲ μέλλῃ πρὸς τὰ κάτω προιέναι, τότε ἄλλα, ἃ οὐκέτι οὐσίαν ποιεῖ, ἀλλὰ ποιὰν οὐσίαν καὶ ποσὴν οὐσίαν, καὶ γιγνέσθω γένη οὐ πρῶτα (Henry/Schwyzer, vol. 3, p. 63; tr. MacKenna/Page, p. 277).

we find in the Universe, we can find imitation of what the One does in producing the Intellect. This does not involve only the things which have cognition and choice, but all existing beings.[467] Therefore, every productive activity is for us a path which leads to understanding the activity of the One. Such activity is in fact divided into two activities: internal and external, which Plotinus explains in this most important fragment:

> "In each and every thing there is an activity which belongs to substance (ἐνέργεια τῆς οὐσίας) and one which goes out from substance (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας); and that which belongs to substance is the active actuality which is each particular thing, and the other activity derives from that first one, and must in everything be a consequence of it, different from the thing itself: as in fire there is a heat which is the content of its substance, and another which comes into being from that primary heat when fire exercises the activity which is native to its substance in abiding unchanged as fire. So it is also in the higher world; and much more so there, while the Principle abides "in its own proper way of life," the activity generated from the perfection in it and its coexistent activity (συνούσης ἐνεργείας) acquires substantial existence, since it comes from a great power, the greatest indeed of all, and arrives at being and substance: for that Principle is "beyond being." That is the productive power of all things, and its product is already all things."[468]

The first activity is then coexistent and identical with substance, and it is itself the very existence of it. The second activity comes out of substance not as something added to it, but rather it is a necessary consequence of the first one. Therefore, the second activity could be understood as the revelation of the very substance of the first one.[469] This fact is very important because the only way to gain any kind of knowledge of the One can be obtained, thanks to what is revealed in the second activity. This concept is very similar to the

467 *Cf. Enn.* V, 4, 1, 26–36 (Henry/Schwyzer, vol. 2, p. 55).
468 *Enn.* V, 4, 2, 27–39. "᾿Ενέργεια ἡ μέν ἐστι τῆς οὐσίας, ἡ δ᾿ ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας ἑκάστου· καὶ ἡ μὲν τῆς οὐσίας αὐτό ἐστιν ἐνέργεια ἕκαστον, ἡ δὲ ἀπ᾿ ἐκείνης, ἣν δεῖ παντὶ ἕπεσθαι ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἑτέραν οὖσαν αὐτοῦ· οἷον καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ πυρὸς ἡ μέν τίς ἐστι συμπληροῦσα τὴν οὐσίαν θερμότης, ἡ δὲ ἀπ᾿ ἐκείνης ἤδη γινομένη ἐνεργοῦντος ἐκείνου τὴν σύμφυτον τῇ οὐσίᾳ ἐν τῷ μένειν πῦρ. Οὕτω δὴ κἀκεῖ· καὶ πολὺ πρότερον ἐκεῖ μένοντος αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ οἰκείῳ ἤθει ἐκ τῆς ἐν αὐτῷ τελειότητος καὶ συνούσης ἐνεργείας ἡ γεννηθεῖσα ἐνέργεια ὑπόστασιν λαβοῦσα, ἅτε ἐκ μεγάλης δυνάμεως, μεγίστης μὲν οὖν ἁπασῶν, εἰς τὸ εἶναι καὶ οὐσίαν ἦλθεν· ἐκεῖνο γὰρ ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας ἦν. Καὶ ἐκεῖνο μὲν δύναμις πάντων, τὸ δὲ ἤδη τὰ πάντα (Henry/Schwyzer, vol. 2, p. 236; tr. D. Bradshaw, *op. cit.*, p. 76).
469 *Cf.* D. Bradshaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 77–78.

second method of theology of Eunomius, who also saw the activity of God as the way to gain knowledge of Him. A second important observation is the relation of activity to life. The two acts are the way in which the One lives its most perfect life. It is worth noting that the theory of the two acts is explained by the example of fire, which is also often used by Gregory of Nyssa in his criticism of Eunomius' opinions, as we will see below.

One of the questions which arise here involves the problem of how the One can be a self-thinking thought without the duality of the subject and object. It seems that Plotinus was aware of the problem and tried to find a solution.[470] Traces of such attempts can be found in the eighth treaty of the sixth Ennead, where he considers the will of the One. Although, as Plotinus observes, there are profound difficulties in forming any conception of what the One is, we can say:

> "If then we are to allow activities in the Supreme and make them depend upon will (ἐνεργείας αὐτοῦ οἷον βουλήσει αὐτοῦ) - and certainly act cannot there be will-less - and those activities are to be very essence, then will and essence in the Supreme must be identical (ἡ βούλησις αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ οὐσία ταὐτὸν ἔσται.). This admitted, as He willed to be so He is; it is no more true to say that He wills and acts as His nature determines than that His essence is as He wills and acts. Thus He is wholly master of Himself and holds His very being ad His will."[471]

If there is any will in the One, it also must be an activity, and it also must be identical with its substance. In this fragment, Plotinus persistently repeats that the activity of will is for the One some kind of self-establishment, and he ends by saying:

> "The Good, then, exists; it holds its existence through choice and will (ἡ αἵρεσις καὶ ἡ βούλησις), conditions of its very being; yet it cannot be a manifold; therefore the will and essential being (τὴν οὐσίαν) must be taken as one identity; the act of the will must be self-determined and the being self-caused; thus reason shows the Supreme to be its own Author. For if the act of will springs from God Himself and is as it were His operation and the same will is identical with essence (δὲ ταὐτὸν

470 *Cf. ibid.*, pp. 87–88.

471 *Enn.* VI, 8, 13, 5–11. Εἰ γὰρ δοίημεν ἐνεργείας αὐτῷ, τὰς δ' ἐνεργείας αὐτοῦ οἷον βουλήσει αὐτοῦ—οὐ γὰρ ἀβουλῶν ἐνεργεῖ—αἱ δὲ ἐνέργειαι ἡ οἷον οὐσία αὐτοῦ, ἡ βούλησις αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ οὐσία ταὐτὸν ἔσται. Εἰ δὲ τοῦτο, ὡς ἄρα ἐβούλετο, οὕτω καὶ ἔστιν. Οὐ μᾶλλον ἄρα ὡς πέφυκε βούλεταί τε καὶ ἐνεργεῖ, ἢ ὡς βούλεταί τε καὶ ἐνεργεῖ ἡ οὐσία ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ. Κύριος ἄρα πάντη ἑαυτοῦ ἐφ' ἑαυτῷ ἔχων καὶ τὸ εἶναι (Henry/Schwyzer, vol. 3, pp. 256–257; tr. MacKenna/Page, p. 349).

τῇ ὑποστάσει αὐτοῦ), he must be self-established. He is not, therefore, "what he happened to be" but what he has willed to be."[472]

The One cannot be many, and it cannot be drowned by anything else but itself. But here we encounter the same problem which we have seen in the case of intellectual activity, because there are also the subject and object of the will. So there is no clear answer to how can the One be simultaneously absolutely simple and divided into the One that wills and that is willed. Another question is how the activity of the will is related to the theory of the double activity of the thought. The text above seems to suggest that we can also speak of the two acts of the will: internal and external. Another solution is to admit that the first activity is the activity of the will and the second one is the activity of the intellect, but Plotinus does not explain clearly that he understood it this way. The final problem which is present here and to which there is no easy answer is what should be understood as first – the activity of the will or the activity of the intellect. Since the One is simple and there is no temporal succession in it, the question seems inadequate. But since the activity of the will is described as self-establishment, it would be logical to assume that such eternal act of establishment is somehow prior to the activity of thinking, which is creative.

This last question is of paramount importance in the context of the Arian controversy, since, as we have already seen, Arius himself conceived the generation of the Son by the Father as the act of will. Therefore, the generation of the Son which is willed by the Father is the primary activity of God. It is worth noticing that Eunomius is here in complete agreement with Arius, and he also sees generation as the act of will, but he explicitly calls it activity. It is yet to be determined below whether we can find any traces of the influence of Plotinus in Eunomius and his Cappadocian opponents, but,

472 *Enn.* VI, 8, 13, 50–59. Εἰ οὖν ὑφέστηκε τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ συνυφίστησιν αὐτὸ ἡ αἵρεσις καὶ ἡ βούλησις—ἄνευ γὰρ τούτων οὐκ ἔσται—δεῖ δὲ τοῦτο μὴ πολλὰ εἶναι, συνακτέον ὡς ἓν τὴν βούλησιν καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν καὶ τὸ θέλειν· τὸ δὲ θέλειν <εἰ> παρ' αὐτοῦ, ἀνάγκη παρ' αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ εἶναι αὐτῷ εἶναι, ὥστε αὐτὸν πεποιηκέναι αὐτὸν ὁ λόγος ἀνεῦρεν. Εἰ γὰρ ἡ βούλησις παρ' αὐτοῦ καὶ οἷον ἔργον αὐτοῦ, αὕτη δὲ ταὐτὸν τῇ ὑποστάσει αὐτοῦ, αὐτὸς ἂν οὕτως ὑποστήσας ἂν εἴη αὐτόν· ὥστε οὐκ ὅπερ ἔτυχέν ἐστιν, ἀλλ' ὅπερ ἐβουλήθη αὐτός (Henry/Schwyzer, vol. 3, p. 258; tr. MacKenna/Page, p. 349).

as we shall see, the problem of will and how it is related to the substance of God is understood by Eunomius in a completely different way.

4.3 The Holy Scripture and early Christian concepts of ἐνέργεια

4.3.1 The Holy Scripture on the activities of God as a way to know His attributes

When making his own version of the theological methods based on substance and activity, Eunomius does not only have an open philosophical tradition to refer to, but we must remember that ἐνέργεια is also present in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament and in the New Testament as well.[473] In the Septuagint, the term is used in the second and third *Book of the Maccabees* and in *The Book of Wisdom*.

In the second *Book of Maccabees*, the term describes the mighty intervention of God in the case of Heliodorus, who planned to rob the treasury of the Temple in Jerusalem (2 Macc: 3, 24–27; 29). In the third book, the activity is ascribed to the operation of the Divine Providence which protects Israel (3 Macc: 4, 21). In *The Book of Wisdom*, ἐνέργεια generally is not applied to God, but to the operations of man, elements, and produced objects.[474] We can find it being used in a fashion already observed in Aristotle, namely to describe the operation of life. In chapter 15, the term appears in the criticism of the pagans, who create their own gods and fail to recognize their Maker. Therefore, "Their heart is ashes, their hope is cheaper than dirt, and their lives are of less worth than clay, because they failed to know the one who formed them and inspired them with active souls (ψυχὴν ἐνεργοῦσαν) and breathed a living spirit into them."[475] We find similar concepts in chapter 13 (1–5), where ἐνέργεια also appears in

---

473 R.P. Vaggione notes that the problem of ἐνέργεια was so important precisely because for the Christian writers, it was not a philosophical issue, but rather it was an exegesis of the Holy Scripture, *cf. Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution*, Oxford 2000, pp. 130–131.

474 *Cf.* J.-C. Larchet, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

475 Wis 15: 10–11. σποδὸς ἡ καρδία αὐτοῦ, καὶ γῆς εὐτελεστέρα ἡ ἐλπὶς αὐτοῦ, πηλοῦ τε ἀτιμότερος ὁ βίος αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἠγνόησε τὸν πλάσαντα αὐτὸν καὶ τὸν ἐμπνεύσαντα αὐτῷ ψυχὴν ἐνεργοῦσαν καὶ ἐμφυσήσαντα πνεῦμα ζωτικόν· (tr. NRSVCE).

the context of failing to recognize the Maker from the beauty of the world and natural activity of elements:

> "…but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water, or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world. If through delight in the beauty of these things men assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them. And if men were amazed at their power and working (δύναμιν καὶ ἐνέργειαν), let them perceive from them how much more powerful is he who formed them. For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator."[476]

Although this fragment does not use ἐνέργεια to describe directly the creative activity of God, it seems to suggest that there is a correlation between the natural activity of created beings and the activity of God. It also confirms that, thanks to proper recognition of the activity of created beings, one can recognize the existence of God. And we have certain analogy here: the beauty of activity found in creations can tell us the eminent degree of the beauty of God. As we have seen above, Philo of Alexandria presented similar ideas in his concept of activity.

From the perspective of the Arian controversy, the most important is a long fragment where Salomon describes impersonated Wisdom (7: 21–11: 3). At the beginning of the fragment, Wisdom is characterized as follows:

> "For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things. For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God (τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐνεργείας), and an image of his goodness."[477]

---

476 Wis 13: 2–5. ἀλλ᾽ ἢ πῦρ ἢ πνεῦμα ἢ ταχινὸν ἀέρα ἢ κύκλον ἄστρων ἢ βίαιον ὕδωρ ἢ φωστῆρας οὐρανοῦ πρυτάνεις κόσμου θεοὺς ἐνόμισαν. ὧν εἰ μὲν τῇ καλλονῇ τερπόμενοι ταῦτα θεοὺς ὑπελάμβανον, γνώτωσαν πόσῳ τούτων ὁ δεσπότης ἐστὶ βελτίων, ὁ γὰρ τοῦ κάλλους γενεσιάρχης ἔκτισεν αὐτά· εἰ δὲ δύναμιν καὶ ἐνέργειαν ἐκπλαγέντες νοησάτωσαν ἀπ᾽ αὐτῶν πόσῳ ὁ κατασκευάσας αὐτὰ δυνατώτερός ἐστιν· ἐκ γὰρ μεγέθους καλλονῆς κτισμάτων ἀναλόγως ὁ γενεσιουργὸς αὐτῶν θεωρεῖται (tr. RSV).

477 Wis 7: 24–26. πάσης γὰρ κινήσεως κινητικώτερον σοφία, διήκει δὲ καὶ χωρεῖ διὰ πάντων διὰ τὴν καθαρότητα· ἀτμὶς γάρ ἐστι τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ δυνάμεως καὶ ἀπόρροια τῆς τοῦ Παντοκράτορος δόξης εἰλικρινής· διὰ τοῦτο οὐδὲν μεμιαμμένον εἰς αὐτὴν παρεμπίπτει. ἀπαύγασμα γάρ ἐστι φωτὸς ἀϊδίου καὶ ἔσοπτρον ἀκηλίδωτον τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐνεργείας καὶ εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ (tr. RSV).

Although Wisdom is not named the activity of God, it is evident that being "a spotless mirror of the activity of God," it is the best way to gain the knowledge of the Creator. Those fragments of *The Book of Wisdom*, however, are far more important in the context of the Arian controversy and the teaching of Eunomius. The Wisdom of God is also described and praised in the Proverbs (8: 1–9: 18), and this fragment contains the key verse 8:22, which was (in the Septuagint version) the only place in the Holy Scripture which could be interpreted as supporting the Arian claim as to the created substance of the Son of God. Anomeans repeatedly quoted Wisdom saying about it: "The Lord created me the beginning of His way for His works (κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ)."[478] The combination of the verse with 1 Corinthians 1:24, where St Paul calls the Son of God Wisdom allowed Eunomians to claim that the Son is "offspring and thing made (γέννημα καὶ ποίημα)."[479]

Therefore, if we look at the fragments from *The Book of Wisdom* in the context of the teaching on wisdom in Proverbs, we discern the significance of the claims that Wisdom is the mirror of God's activity. This is certainly one of the most important sources of Eunomius' second way of theology. But, as we will see, those verses from *The Book of Wisdom* are significant not only because they speak about the way of recognizing God and Creator, but also because of the famous fragment of the Letter to the Romans which refers to them.

In the New Testament, the term ἐνέργεια is used in various forms to describe the spiritual activities of man, of Satan, but most of all is applied to many aspects of the operations of God, who acts in sacraments, in the soul of man, and in Christ. Most occurrences are to be found in Paul's

---

478 R.P. Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cysiucs and the Nicene Revolution*, Oxford 2000, pp. 83–84. Gregory of Nyssa also confirms a very frequent use of the verse: "However, that passage from Proverbs may perhaps be quoted to us by them, which the advocates of the heresy constantly quote as proof that the Lord was created…" Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* III, 1, 21 (GNO II, p. 10).

479 Eunomius uses this expression in *Liber apologeticus*, 12, 1–3 (R.P. Vaggione, pp. 46–48). For a full discussion on the verse and its meaning, *cf.* T. Stępień, *Created or uncreated Wisdom? op. cit.*, pp. 147–155.

letters.[480] For our purposes, two fragments need to be mentioned. As we shall see, Eunomius strongly opposes the conception of identity of the activity of the Divine Persons, but in the Gospel of John, there is passage 5: 19 which reads: "My Father is working still, and I am working."[481] Those words of Jesus were understood by his interlocutors as making himself equal to God. They also were very often used by the Orthodox to claim the unity of the activity of the Divine Persons.

The second fragment that was mentioned above is a passage from Romans 1: 18–2:

> "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened."[482]

Although in this passage, the term ἐνέργεια is not present, it confirms that the Greeks obtained the knowledge of God from what He has made. The context of failing to draw conclusions from this knowledge and honouring God makes it very similar to the fragments of *The Book of Wisdom* where the term occurs (13: 1–5) in the context of knowing the attributes of God from His works which one can observe in creations. It is worth noting that this time, the accusation does not refer to pagans in general, but directly to Greeks.

It is worth noting that in his letters, St Paul now and again repeats that the activity of man, especially the Apostolic one, is in fact the activity in accordance with that of God, who Himself works. He also draws special attention to the activity of God in the human soul.[483]

480 *Cf.* Jean-Claude Larchet analyses the occurrences of ἐνέργεια in the New Testament in *op. cit.*, pp. 86–91.

481 ὁ πατήρ μου ἕως ἄρτι ἐργάζεται, κἀγὼ ἐργάζομαι (tr. RSVCE).

482 διότι τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ φανερόν ἐστιν ἐν αὐτοῖς· ὁ γὰρ Θεὸς αὐτοῖς ἐφανέρωσε. τὰ γὰρ ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου τοῖς ποιήμασι νοούμενα καθορᾶται, ἥ τε ἀΐδιος αὐτοῦ δύναμις καὶ θειότης, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἀναπολογήτους, διότι γνόντες τὸν Θεὸν οὐχ ὡς Θεὸν ἐδόξασαν ἢ εὐχαρίστησαν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐσκοτίσθη ἡ ἀσύνετος αὐτῶν καρδία· (tr. RSVCE).

483 *Cf.* D. Bradshaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 121–122.

As we can see the fragments of the Old and New Testament, which use various forms of ἐνέργεια, certainly do not contain a systematic theological teaching on the activities of God. But they certainly include many elements which will be commented upon and developed by the Fathers,[484] and they also explain why Eunomius insisted that his teaching comes directly from the Holy Scripture.

4.3.2 The Church Fathers and the sources of Eunomius' methods

Looking for the sources of Eunomius' notion of ἐνέργεια, we must also make some remarks on the earlier Christian tradition. Although the occurrences of ἐνέργεια are not very frequent, we can observe it being used already in the works of Athenagoras. He is probably the first author who tries to make a distinction between substance and activity and apply ἐνέργεια to the Logos. At the beginning of *De resurrectione*, he says about those who do not believe in resurrection:

> "For such men have left no truth free from their calumnious attacks – not the being of God, not His knowledge, not His operations (οὐ τὴν οὐσίαν τοῦ θεοῦ, οὐ τὴν γνῶσιν, οὐ τὴν ἐνέργειαν), not those books which follow by a regular and strict sequence from these and delineate for us the doctrines of piety."[485]

Although this text refers rather to those who argue for the impossibility of resurrection, it clearly states that there is a difference between substance, knowledge, and activities of God. Athenagoras also uses ἐνέργεια to describe the act of creation which is completed, thanks to the Son of God. Therefore, he says that "the Son of God is the Logos of the Father, in idea and in operation (ἐν ἰδέᾳ καὶ ἐνεργείᾳ); for after the pattern of Him and by Him were all things made."[486] In this fragment, Athenagoras not only explains the role of the Logos, but also tries to explain how the Father generates the Son, who is equal to him.[487] It is also worth mentioning Theophilus of Antioch, who also shared the conviction that we can know God, thanks to

---

484 *Cf.* J.-C. Larchet, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
485 *De resurrectione* I, 2 (SC 397, pp. 214–219; tr. ANF, vol. 2, p. 149).
486 *Libellus pro christianis* 10, 2 (SC 397, p. 102; tr. ANF, vol. 2, p. 133).
487 *Ibid.* 10, 3 (SC 397, p. 102; tr. ANF, vol. 2, p. 133). It is worth noting that the activity of the Son resembles the work of the Demiurge who gives the form and is the source of life (J.-C. Larchet, *op. cit.*, p. 99).

His activities, but he claimed that we can know only His Power, whereas God Himself remains incomprehensible.[488]

We can also observe some important occurrences of ἐνέργεια in the writings of the Alexandrian Fathers. Explaining the prologue of the Gospel of John Clement, it says: "<all things were made through him>, according to continuous activity of Logos in constant identity: spiritual and intellectual as well as sensual things."[489] This verse is the continuation of his comment on J 1:1–2, and thus Clement seems to confirm identity of the activity of the Father and the Son. The Logos play a prime role in creation, but his activity does not make him separate from the Father.[490] In *Stromata*, when arguing against the Gnostics that Christ is the Saviour of all things, he explains the nature of the Son from the perspective of God and His creative power. In his excellence and perfection, he is beyond time and place, and he does all things in accordance with the will of the Father. Therefore, he not only plays the most important role in the creation, but he also is the supreme ruler of the world. Therefore, he: "holds the helm of the universe in the best way, with unwearied and tireless power, working all things in which it operates, keeping in view its hidden designs."[491] Therefore, Clement calls the Son certain activity of the Father,[492] and he seems to make a link between substance, power, activity, and the product.[493]

---

488 *Cf. Ad Autol.* I, 3, 2, 6–13, especially where he claims that "…if I call Him Power, I am mentioning His activity (δύναμιν ἐάν εἴπω, ἐνέργειαν αὐτοῦ λέγω)" (SC 20, pp. 62–64; tr. ANF, vol 2, pp. 89–90).

489 *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 8, 1, 2 «Πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο», κατὰ τὴν προσεχῆ ἐνέργειαν τοῦ ἐν ταὐτότητι Λόγου, τά τε πνευματικὰ καὶ νοητὰ καὶ αἰσθητά (SC 23, p. 72; tr. Pierce/Casey, p.47).

490 *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 8, 1, 1 (SC 23, p. 72).

491 *Strom.* VII, 2, 5, 4. καὶ τὸ πᾶν ἄριστα οἰακίζει, ἀκαμάτῳ καὶ ἀτρύτῳ δυνάμει πάντα ἐργαζομένη, δι' ὧν ἐνεργεῖ τὰς ἀποκρύφους ἐννοίας ἐπιβλέπουσα (SC 428, p. 48; tr. ANF, vol. 2, p. 524).

492 *Strom.* VII, 2, 7, 7, "Now the energy of the Lord has a reference to the Almighty; and the Son is, so to speak, an energy of the Father." πᾶσα δὲ ἡ τοῦ κυρίου ἐνέργεια ἐπὶ τὸν παντοκράτορα τὴν ἀναφορὰν ἔχει, καὶ ἔστιν ὡς εἰπεῖν πατρική τις ἐνέργεια ὁ υἱός. (SC 428, p. 56; tr. ANF, vol. 2, p. 525).

493 A similar view of causality will be later presented by Eunomius. *Cf.* M.R. Barnes, *The Background and Use of Eunomius' Casual Language*, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

But the most interesting use of ἐνέργεια can be found in the fourth chapter of the eighth book of *Stromata*, where Clement claims that to solve any question, one must begin with a clear definition of the thing discussed. Sometimes, the object of investigation is the mere essence (οὐσία) of the thing, like in the case of stones, plants, and animals, in the case of which the activities are unknown to us (ὧν τὰς ἐνεργείας ἀγνοοῦμεν).[494] In other cases, we know certain powers or properties of things, but we do not know the essences and, therefore, we must make them the object of investigation:

> "But in many instances, our understanding having assumed all these, the question is, in which of the essences do they thus inhere; for it is after forming conceptions of both - that is, both of essence and activity (ἀμφοτέρων γάρ, τῆς τε οὐσίας τῆς τε ἐνεργείας) - in our mind, that we proceed to the question. And there are also some objects, whose activities, along with their essences, we know, but are ignorant of their modifications."[495]

And he adds: "Such, then, is the method (μέθοδος) of the discovery [of the truth]."[496] Since Clement concentrates mostly on investigating the essence of animals, it is obvious that activity is treated by him as a property which can lead us to knowledge, that the essence in question is the essence of animals. Then he recalls the positions of Plato and Aristotle. While the former called plants the animals, the latter insisted that since they do not possess the power of sensation, they cannot be properly called animals.[497] To resolve those antagonistic positions, one must answer the question using two methods of applying the term "animal":

---

494 *Strom.* VIII, 4, 9, 1–2. εἶναι δὲ <δυνατὸν> τὴν γνῶσιν τὴν προϋπάρξασαν τοῦ ζητουμένου παντὸς ποτὲ μὲν τῆς οὐσίας ψιλῶς ἀγνοουμένων [δὲ] τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς, οἷον λίθων, φυτῶν, ζῴων, ὧν τὰς ἐνεργείας ἀγνοοῦμεν, ἢ παθῶν ἢ δυνάμεων ἢ ἁπλῶς εἰπεῖν [ἓν] τῶν ὑπαρχόντων τοῖς οὖσιν· (GCS 17, p. 85; tr. ANF, vol. 2, p. 560).

495 *Strom.* VIII, 4, 9, 3–6. ἐν πολλοῖς δέ, τῆς νοήσεως αὐτῆς τῆς ἡμετέρας ὑποτιθεμένης ἑαυτῇ ταῦτα πάντα, τὴν ζήτησιν εἶναι, τίνι τῶν οὐσιῶν ἂν οὕτω μὲν ὑπάρχῃ· ἀμφοτέρων γάρ, τῆς τε οὐσίας τῆς τε ἐνεργείας, τὰς ἐπινοίας ἐν τῇ διανοίᾳ λαβόντες οὕτως ἐπὶ τὴν ζήτησιν ἐρχόμεθα. ἔστιν δὲ ὧν καὶ τὰς ἐνεργείας εἰδότες ἅμα ταῖς οὐσίαις ἀγνοοῦμεν τὰ παθήματα. Ἔστιν οὖν ἡ μέθοδος τῆς εὑρέσεως τοιαύτη· (GCS 17, p. 85; tr. ANF, vol. 2, p. 560).

496 *Strom.* VIII, 4, 9, 6. Ἔστιν οὖν ἡ μέθοδος τῆς εὑρέσεως τοιαύτη· (GCS 17, p. 85; tr. ANF, vol. 2, p. 560).

497 *Strom.* VIII, 4, 9, 3–6 (GCS 17, p. 86, ANF, vol. 2, p. 560).

> "But as there are two methods, one by question and answer, and the other the method of exposition, if he declines the former, let him listen to us, while we expound all that bears on the problem."[498]

It seems that here Clement passes from the method of recognizing the essence to the ways of discussion, so there is only a vague reference to the two methods of theology of Eunomius. But the first part of this fragment bears more visible reference. In the first case, we can know only the "mere essence" of the thing (e.g., stone), and since it is inanimate, we cannot recognize its proper activity. In the second case, since we deal with something which is alive, the activity can be known and therefore it is the way of discovering the essence. Therefore, Clement seems to be a predecessor of Eunomius, who considers his two methods in a more developed way and applies it to the essence and activity of God.[499] But it is worth noting that this reference evokes only the second method of Eunomius: from activity to substance.

Origen, who is far more important because of his influence on the writers of the 4th century, also provides some important uses of ἐνέργεια, especially when he comments on Wisdom 7, where he tries to formulate a definition of activity:

> But wisdom is also called the stainless mirror of the ἐνέργειας or working of God. We must first understand, then, what the working of the power of God is. It is a sort of vigour, so to speak, by which God operates either in creation, or in providence, or in judgment, or in the disposal and arrangement of individual things, each in its season. For as the image formed in a mirror unerringly reflects all the acts and movements of him who gazes on it, so would Wisdom have herself to be understood when she is called the stainless mirror of the power and working of the Father: as the Lord Jesus Christ also, who is the Wisdom of God, declares of Himself when He says, "The works which the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise."[500]

---

498 *Strom.* VIII, 4, 11, 4. ἱ δὲ δυοῖν τρόποιν ὑπαρχόντοιν, ἑτέρου μὲν τοῦ κατ' ἐρώτησίν τε καὶ ἀπόκρισιν, ἑτέρου δὲ τοῦ κατὰ διέξοδον, ἤρνηται τὸ ἕτερον, ἐπακουσάτω πάντα τὰ εἰς τὸ πρόβλημα διεξιόντων ἡμῶν· (GCS 17, p. 86; tr. ANF, vol. 2, p. 561).

499 *Cf.* M.R. Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

500 *De princ.* I, 2, 12, 411–425. "Sed et speculum immaculatum ἐνέργειας (id est inoperationis) dei esse sapitentia nominatur. Ergo inoperatio uirtutis de quae sit, prius intellegenda est; quae est uigor quidam, ut ita dixerim, per quem

Although this text was preserved only in the Latin version, it is remarkable that Tyrannius Rufinus left the Greek term in the translation. He probably thought that there was no proper Latin equivalent of ἐνέργεια.[501] In this fragment, Origen not only explains 7: 24–26, drawing special attention to Wisdom being the clear mirror of the activity of God, but he also links the text of Wisdom with the Gospel of John 5: 19. By doing this, Origen confirms the unity of the activity of the Father and the Son, which was later rejected by Eunomius. Moreover, Origen also claims that there are multiple activities, such as creation, providence, or judgement, which is also important in the context of the problem, present in Eunomius' *Apology*, whether we can assume the multiple or only one activity of God.

The last Father which must be presented before we turn to Eunomius is Athanasius. As D. Bradshaw notes, in the 4th century, during the Arian and Neo-Arian controversy, the term ἐνέργεια became the key term to describe the activity of God in the world, and human soul and participation in the divine activities began to be understood as divinization.[502] But it could be understood in this way only because the term became also the main way of describing the activities of the Divine Persons. Athanasius uses the distinction between substance and activity to demonstrate consubstantiality of the Divine Persons in opposition to those who denied the Divinity of the Holy Spirit. Saying that the three persons are the source of life, justification, and

inoperatur pater, uel cum creat uel cum proudet uel cum iudicat uel cum singula quaeque in tempor suo disponit atque dispensat. Sicut ergo in speculo omnibus motibus atque omnibus antibus, quibus is qui speculum intuetur mouetur uel agit, isdem ipsis etiam ea imago, quae per speculum deformatur, actibus et motibus commouetur uel agit, in nullo prorsus declinano: ita etiam sapentia de se uult intellegi, cum speculum immaculatatm pateranae uirtutis inoperationisque nominatur; sicut et dominus Iesus Christus, qui est sapietntia dei, de semet ipso pronuntiat dicens quia *opera quae facit pater*, *haak etiam filius facti similiter*" (SC 252, pp. 138–141; tr. ANF, vol. 4, p. 251).

501 Rufinus does a similar thing in the translation of another fragment of *Peri Archon* (III, 3, 4, 151–172; SC 268, pp. 192–195), where Origen speaks about the activities of human soul. Here, however, he simply puts the Greek word in the Latin version as "energeia." Commenting on this passage, D. Bradshaw notes that Origen presents the standard understanding of ἐνέργεια (*op. cit.*, pp. 124–125).

502 *Cf.* D. Bradshaw, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

sanctification, he demonstrates that the Son is equal to the Father because of the unity of the activity:

> "This consideration shows that the activity of the Trinity is one. The Apostle does not mean that the things which are given are given differently and separately by each Person, but that what is given is given in the Trinity, and that all are from the one God. Him therefore who is no creature but is one with the Son as the Son is one with the Father, who is glorified with the Father and the Son, who is confessed as God with the Word, who is active in the works which the Father works through the Son – is not the man who calls him a creature guilty of a direct impiety against the Son himself? For there is nothing that is not originated and actuated through the Word in the Spirit."[503]

For Athanasius, the activity of the Holy Spirit is then the same as that of the Father and the Son, and, therefore, all grace is given by the Trinity, but can be recognized as having the intrinsic order. There is, however, certain difficulty because Athanasius does not say precisely how we can draw a distinction between the persons while their activity is unified.[504] But he seems to be satisfied with showing the sequence: the Father, "through" the Son and "in" the Holy Spirit, which we also can see in one of the preceding passages:

> "The Trinity is holy and perfect, confessed in the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, having nothing foreign or external mixed with it, not composed of one that creates and one that is originated, but all creative; and it is consistent and in nature indivisible, and its activity is one. The Father does all things through the Word in the Holy Spirit. Thus the unity of the holy Trinity is preserved. Thus one God is preached in the Church, who is over all, and through all, and in all."[505]

---

503 *Ep. ad Serap.* I, 31, 1–3. Μία ἄρα καὶ ἐκ τούτων ἡ τῆς τριάδος ἐνέργεια δείκνυται. Οὐ γὰρ ὡς παρ' ἑκάστου διάφορα καὶ διῃρημένα τὰ διδόμενα σημαίνει ὁ ᾿Απόστολος· ἀλλ' ὅτι τὰ διδόμενα ἐν Τριάδι δίδοται, καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐξ ἑνὸς Θεοῦ ἐστι. Τὸ τοίνυν μὴ ὂν κτίσμα, ἀλλ' ἡνωμένον τῷ Υἱῷ, ὡς ὁ Υἱὸς ἥνωται τῷ Πατρὶ, τὸ συνδοξαζόμενον Πατρὶ καὶ Υἱῷ, καὶ θεολογούμενον μετὰ τοῦ Λόγου, ἐνεργοῦν τε ἅπερ ὁ Πατὴρ διὰ τοῦ Υἱοῦ ἐργάζεται, πῶς ὁ λέγων κτίσμα οὐκ ἄντικρυς εἰς αὐτὸν τὸν Υἱὸν ἀσεβεῖ; Οὐδὲν γάρ ἐστιν ὃ μὴ διὰ τοῦ Λόγου ἐν τῷ Πνεύματι γίνεται καὶ ἐνεργεῖται (Savvidis, p. 526; tr. Shapland, pp. 142–143).

504 *Cf.* D. Bradshaw, *op. cit.* pp. 155–156.

505 *Ep. ad Serap.* I, 28, 2–3. τριὰς τοίνυν ἁγία καὶ τελεία ἐστὶν, ἐν πατρὶ καὶ υἱῷ καὶ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι θεολογουμένη, οὐδὲν ἀλλότριον ἢ ἔξωθεν ἐπιμιγνύμενον ἔχουσα, οὐδὲ ἐκ δημιουργοῦ καὶ γενητοῦ συνισταμένη, ἀλλ' ὅλη τοῦ κτίζειν καὶ δημιουργεῖν οὖσα· ὁμοία δὲ ἑαυτῇ καὶ ἀδιαίρετός ἐστι τῇ φύσει, καὶ μία ταύτης ἡ

The unity of the Trinity can be recognized according to one activity of the Persons, but here we also find traces of a distinction between the nature and activities of God, which has almost the same meaning as that between substance and activity which we find in Eunomius.

At the end of our quest for the sources of Eunomius' understanding of activity, we may note that the Church Fathers did not make this concept the central idea in their notion of God. But we can see continuity of the tradition and systematic development of the theological idea, which becomes more and more important until the 4th century. Therefore, there are two observations to be made here. Firstly, this development seems to be linked with the understanding of the Trinity and evolution of Trinitarian theology, so it appears that the growing problems of naming the oneness of God who exists as three Persons forced Christian writers to search for the terms and concepts which could express and describe the most important dogma of the faith.

Secondly, since the term invented by Aristotle was also present in *Septuagint* and especially in the Letters of St Paul, Christian writers had no objection to exploit it. However, we must also notice that it has various meanings in the Holy Scripture, and we find no solid explanation of its meaning, especially in early writings. There is also a very limited discussion of how to understand its use when applied to the operations of God. But since it was present both in the Holy Scripture and the philosophical tradition, its meaning and importance grow in proportion to its use of philosophy in explaining Christian beliefs. Especially the writings of Philo, which were widely read by Christians, provided the most important link between philosophical concepts and the Father's teachings. It is obvious that those two features become most important during the Arian controversy, when there is an urgent need to explain the relation of the Son to Father, and, therefore, there is also a need to find the concepts to express it. That is why the philosophical ideas found their new place in theological systems of the 4th century as never before in the history of Christian writings, despite

ἐνέργεια. Ὁ γὰρ πατὴρ διὰ τοῦ λόγου ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ τὰ πάντα ποιεῖ· καὶ οὕτως ἡ ἑνότης τῆς ἁγίας τριάδος σώζεται· καὶ οὕτως εἷς θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ κηρύττεται, «ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων, καὶ διὰ πάντων, καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν.» (Savvidis, p. 520; tr. Shapland, pp. 134–135 with my own alterations).

constant accusations from both sides of being too fond of using the Hellenic concepts. Therefore, during the Arian controversy, the concept of ἐνέργεια of God also becomes the key theological problem.

4.4 The knowledge of the Unbegotten substance in two ways

The historical analysis of the use of ἐνέργεια clearly shows that Eunomius could treat his two theological methods as being rooted in the Holy Scripture and Christian tradition. But since its use was not so common in the writings of his predecessors, it seems that it was his own idea to ascribe such a great role to the distinction between substance and activity. It is also noticeable that with a small exception of Clement of Alexandria, nobody before Eunomius made any attempt to build a theological method based on this distinction, which is crucial to obtaining the knowledge of the essence of God. Therefore, we can now examine the two ways of Eunomius and his claims that those are the ways which can give us the knowledge of the unbegotten essence of God.

4.4.1 The first method – from substance to activity

Eunomius begins his first way with a statement that God was not generated by Himself or any other being, because it is impossible. He claims that such a statement is in accordance "both with innate knowledge (τε φυσικὴν ἔννοιαν) and the teaching of the Fathers."[506] It is impossible that something existed before God, and that God existed before Himself, because then in both cases, we should admit that this first being was God, and the latter must be called a creation.[507] However, these claims are obvious and nobody can deny it. Already at the beginning of the passage, Eunomius prepares his further demonstration because he does not use the term κτίζω but γίνομαι.[508] This term leads directly to ἀγέννητος and serves well the conclusion of this

506 LA 7, 1–3 (Vaggione, p. 40).
507 LA 7, 3–11 (Vaggione, p. 40).
508 LA 7, 3 (Vaggione, p. 40).

passage, where he says that God is "Unbegotten or rather unbegotten essence (οὐσία ἀγέννητος)."[509]

In the next chapter, Eunomius further demonstrates why the name "Unbegotten" is the proper name to honour God. This is not:

> "only the name in conformity with human invention (κατ᾽ἐπίνοιαν ἀνθρωπίνην); rather in conformity with reality, we ought to repay him the debt which above all other is most due God: the acknowledgement that he is what he is."[510]

This statement is an expression of the theory of names, which was popular with Heteroousians. They believed that the real knowledge of beings is a kind of the comprehension of their essences. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, this conviction was the basis of their missionary activity, but in this belief, they were also heirs of the philosophical tradition which is already well analysed by F. DelCogliano.[511] Just like for Aetius the name "Unbegotten" is not based on any human recognition or invention (ἐπίνοια) or privation (στέρησις), and although Eunomius never expresses it, the only way by which man can know this true name is that it was revealed.[512] Eunomius provides an explanation why this name cannot be obtained by privation and thus cannot be treated as a negative one. In a much clearer way than Aetius, he states that being generated is not a property of God, and, therefore, the name "Ungenerated" cannot be privation of a property that God does not have.[513] The language that is used by Eunomius especially in this fragment was recognized by R. Mortley as a

509 LA 8, 11 (Vaggione, p. 40). F. DelCogliano points out that the second statement, that God is "unbegotten substance" is controversial, and since it does not follow logically from the premises, it can only be explained by Eunomius' theory of names, *cf. op. cit.*, p. 33.

510 LA 8, 1–3. οὐκ ὀνόματι μόνον κατ᾽ἐπίνοιαν ἀνθρωπίνην σεμνύνειν οἰόμεθα δεῖν, ἀποτιννύναι δὲ κατ᾽ ἀλήθειαν τὸ πάντων ἀναγκαιότατον ὄφλημα τῷ θεῷ, τῆν τοῦ εἶναι ὅ ἐστιν ὁμολογίαν (Vaggione, pp. 40–42).

511 *Cf.* DelCogliano's analysis of the Heteroosuian claims (*op. cit.*, pp. 38–48) and the discussion on their philosophical background (pp. 49–95). He concludes that the most probable source for Heteroousians was the doctrine of Plato's *Cratylus* developed and modified in Middle-Platonism mainly by Philo (see conclusions on pp. 92–95).

512 *Cf.* DelCogliano, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

513 LA 8, 7–14. (Vaggione, pp. 42–43).

very sophisticated application of negative theology.[514] His main conclusion is that the Neo-Arian distinguished negation from privation, because he recognized, developing the statements of his teacher Aetius, that the privative type of negation "carried with it a positive statement of some sort."[515]

But there still remains one fundamental issue of the conception of God which is the outcome of negative theology. Can we say that the goal of the application of negative language is to demonstrate that God is open to our intellectual capabilities and can be comprehended at least in part? Or negative theology is rather the way to say that we cannot comprehend God at all, and, therefore, while speaking of Him, we can use only negative terms. In my opinion, the following passages from *Liber apologeticus* will show that Eunomius cannot escape from using the negative language when he explains how we should understand unbegotten God, but it is not enough to name him a negative theologian.

From this point in his *Apology*, Eunomius goes on in the Aetius-like fashion proposing the hypotheses and showing that the conclusions are impossible to accept. He tries to show that, if one accepts the conception of the "unbegotten essence," any demonstration based on sharing or passing on this essence to any other being must lead to absurdities (ἀτοπίαις).[516]

The first concept which Eunomius examines is sharing the same essence of the Unbegotten by separation and division (διαιροῖτο καὶ μερίζοιτο).[517] It is impossible because God cannot be the result of separation. Since division is the principle of corruption, so if the Unbegotten shares His essence this way, He would be destructible. His essence also cannot be compared to anything else since it has nothing in common with any other beings which

514 R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, *op. cit.*, pp. 135–139.

515 *Ibid.*, p. 137. It is worth noting that R. Mortley also expresses the doubts of whether Eunomius himself was deliberately using the sophisticated Neoplatonic logic and understood all consequences of his philosophical claims. He says: "Eunomius' attempt to have this two-level function of privation mean ontological primary and secondariness, may not be entirely convincing, but is nevertheless clever and shows a knowledge of contemporary philosophy" (p. 139).

516 LA 9, 6 (Vaggione, p. 42)

517 LA 9, 7 (Vaggione, p. 42). This fragment could be an allusion to the objection made to the Arian movement in general which was present at the Council of Nice (*cf.* SC 305, p. 251, footnote 5).

are begotten, but if one does so, the name must also be common to all beings which have comparative essence.[518]

The second topic aimed at showing the absurdity of the Orthodox claims which Eunomius proposes is the presentation of the various meanings of the sequence of substances, such as time (χρόνος), age (αἰών) or order (τάξις).[519] In the case of the latter, he simply states that implying order to God would be ascribing to His substance something from the outside, while there is no property which He does not already possess.[520] Similarly, understanding the sequence in a manner of time and age would mean applying to God something which is prior to Him. What is interesting, Eunomius uses the definition of time which has its deep philosophical roots in Plato's *Timaeus*: "time is a certain motion of the stars" (ὅ τε χρόνος ἀστέρων ποιά τίς ἐστι κίνησις).[521] He explains that since the stars were created not only after the intelligent beings, but also after the creation of some material elements, as one can read in *The Book of Genesis* (1, 14); therefore, to imply that there is time in the essence of God is unthinkable, since time depends on the movement of created material beings. In the case of the third possibility (sequence of the ages), to refute it, Eunomius simply quotes Psalm 54, 20 which reads: "God exists before the ages" and those words, as he says, are confirmed by "common opinion" (τῶν κοινῶν λογισμῶν).[522] All those cases

518 LA 9, 8–13. (Vaggione pp. 44–45). Although this fragment sounds like pure logical expressions, it is hard to find any clear philosophical references. It is, however, similar to what Aristotle says on the division and simultaneity in *Categories* (13, 14 b, 24–15 a, 13), and also about the division as the method of demonstration, which cannot be used to demonstrate either essence or of accidents of being in *Prior Analytics* (I, 32, 46 a, 32–46 b, 37).

519 LA 10, 4–5 (Vaggione pp. 44–45).

520 LA 10, 5–6 (Vaggione pp. 44–45).

521 LA 10, 5–6 (Vaggione pp. 44–45), Although the obvious reference is *Timaeus* (37 C-39 C), where Plato explains that time was created along with the universe, and it is intrinsically linked with the evolution of heavenly bodies, this passage of Plato was not clear. Simplicius refers that Eudemus, Theophrastus, and Alexander proposed a definition identical to that of Eunomius, since they identified time with the movement of the heavenly spheres (A. Smith, *Eternity and Time*, in: *Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. L.P. Gerson, Cambridge 1996, p. 206).

522 LA 10, 10 (Vaggione, pp. 44–45).

would either imply the existence of something prior to God, or a composite nature of his absolutely simple substance. This cannot be accepted, as well as the composition, which implies shape, mass, or size.[523]

Having excluded all cases whereby something prior to the substance of God must be accepted, Eunomius enumerates possible situations when something is equal to it. But even likening, comparison, and association with the substance (κατ᾽οὐσίαν ὁμοιότητος ἢ συγκρίσεως ἢ κοινωνίας) of the Unbegotten is impossible, because it would lead to a conclusion that the substance of the Son which is in such relation with the Unbegotten is unbegotten as well.[524] It not only ends with the illogical conclusion that the Son is unbegotten, but also is contrary to the word of Jesus who said: "the Father who sent me is greater than I" (14: 28).[525]

At this point of his *Liber apologeticus*, Eunomius significantly changes the main line of the demonstration. He evokes the famous Arian watchword that the Son is "<offspring> and <thing made>" (γέννημα καὶ ποίημα), and he insists that those are "the words of the Saints" which resolve all the problems with the nature of the substance of the Son.[526] But it seems that Eunomius is not so sure about the obvious truth of these words, because the subsequent chapters contain an explanation why it is necessary to admit that the generation of the Son must be understood as creation. He discusses possible ways of conceiving generation as a physical change, augmentation, or transformation and argues that all those must sustain the conclusion that the Son is a creation.[527]

Those arguments lead Eunomius to the exposition of the proper understanding of generation as applied to God. He makes here a very important

---

523 LA 10, 10–11.3 (Vaggione, pp. 44–47).
524 LA 11, 4–10 (Vaggione, pp. 46–47).
525 LA 11, 11–14 (Vaggione, pp. 46–47).
526 LA 12, 1–3 (Vaggione, pp. 46–48). It is worth noticing that although Eunomius claims that reference is clear, it is in fact very uncertain, and Basil points out that Eunomius must first explain what "Saints" he had in mind (Basil, *Con. Eun.* 2, 2, 1–2; SC 305, p. 12).
527 LA 12, 7–17, 3 (Vaggione, pp. 46–55). For a complete analysis of Eunomius' arguments of this fragment as well as the counterarguments of his opponents, *cf.* T. Stępień, *op. cit.*, pp. 148–150.

distinction between two kinds of names that we apply to God, which are homonyms and synonyms:

> "What well-disposed person would not acknowledge that there are some words which have only their sound and utterance in common but not at all their signification? For instance, 'eye' is used of both human beings and God, but in the case of the one it signifies a certain bodily member while in the case of the other it means sometimes God's care and protection of the righteous, sometimes his knowledge of events. On the other hand, the majority of words [referring to God] are different in their verbal expression but have the same meaning, as for instance, 'I Am' (Ex 3:14), and 'only true God'." (J 17:3).[528]

Eunomius states that the names used of both simple and complex beings are homonymous, whereas all names used of simple beings are synonymous. Therefore, such names as "I Am" and "Only true God" can be applied to God in the same way as "Unbegotten," since they name His unbegotten substance. They simply cannot mean anything else because of God's simplicity.[529]

But such names as "Father" and "eye" do not name the same substance in the case of creatures and God, so they are homonyms. Therefore, they do not name the substance as such, but rather the activities of God. Somewhat earlier, Eunomius argued that generation or creation of God cannot be understood in a sensual way, and it is exactly the "error of Greeks" (Ἑλληνικὴ πλανή) who thought that Divine generation must necessarily presuppose pre-existent matter as a kind of a receptacle of creation.[530] It seems to be once again the reference to *Timaeus* of Plato, but while the first one was simply the quotation of the definition of time from the dialogue (or rather

528 LA 16, 9–17, 3. τίς γὰρ οὐκ ἂν ὁμολογήσειεν τῶν εὐφρονούντων ὅτι τῶν ὀνμάτων τὰ μὲν κατὰ τὴν ἐκφώνησιν καὶ προφορὰν τὴν κοινωνίαν ἔχει μόνον, οὐκ ἔτι δὲ κατὰ τὴν σημασίαν; ὡς ὀφθαλμὸς ἐπὶ τε ἀνθρώπου καὶ θεοῦ λεγόμενος, τοῦ μὲν γὰρ σημαίνει τι μέρος, τοῦ δὲ ποτὲ μὲν ἀντίληφιν καὶ φυλακὴν τῶν δικαιῶν, ποτὲ δὲ τὴν πραττομένων γνῶσιν· τὰ δὲ πολλὰ κατὰ τὴν ἐκφώνησιν κεχωρισμένα τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχει σημασίαν, ὡς τὸ ὢν καὶ μόνος ἀληθινὸς θεός (Vaggione, pp. 53–55).

529 *Cf.* F. DelCogliano, *op. cit.*, pp. 39–40. He is right to suggest that what Eunomius means here is God's simplicity based not only on the lack of composition of bodily parts (as R.P. Vaggione's translation suggests) but having no composition of any parts.

530 LA 16, 4–6 (Vaggione, pp. 52–53).

its later interpretations) which supported his thesis, this time the teaching of Plato is rejected as false.[531]

Having expounded on homonyms and synonyms, Eunomius once again explains that the name "Father" has a different meaning in the case of God and bodily things, but this time, he uses the term ἐνέργεια:

> "Accordingly, it is by no means necessary, when God is called 'Father', to understand this activity as having the same meaning that it does with human beings, as involving in both cases the idea of mutability or passion; the one activity, is passionless, while the other involves passion."[532]

The activity of God which is generation cannot involve any concepts taken from the bodily one, and it must be recognized as passionless. Such understanding of the activity of generation is possible only because the substance of the Unbegotten was conceived earlier as absolutely simple. Eunomius thinks that also such names as "spirit," "thing made," and "offspring" are homonymous, because there are many beings which can be called with those names, so they do not necessarily name specific essences.[533]

Despite all those explanations, there is very little we can say about the activity of God which is generation. We can confirm that it must be abstracted from all bodily features and from all composition. Similarly, the name "Unbegotten," although it cannot be treated as a negative predicate, can be described only in a negative way. Although Eunomius seems to be unaware that he uses negative terms, he constantly says that God is without composition, without equality with any other being, without any priority

---

531 Plato introduces his conception of a receptacle as "third kind" (*tritos genos*), (48 E – 57 D) apart from the forms and what participates in the forms. It is very likely that Eunomius refers once again to *Timaeus*, but it is also worth noting that "receptacle is probably the hardest and most philosophically challenging concept in *Timaeus*" (A. Gregory, Plato, Introduction in: *Timaeus and Critias*, tr. R. Waterfield, Oxford 2008, p. XLIX).

532 LA 17, 4–6 (Vaggione, pp. 54–55). Οὐκοῦν οὐδὲ ὅταν λέγηται πατὴρ κοινὴν ἐννοεῖν χρὴ πρὸς ἀντθρώπους τὴν ἐνέργειαν, ἐπ᾽ ἀμφοῖν συνεπινοοῦντας ταύτῃ ῥεῦσιν ἢ πάθος, ἐπείπερ, ἡ μέν ἐστιν ἀπαθής, ἡ δὲ μετὰ πάθους (Vaggione, pp. 54–55).

533 *Cf*. LA 17, 7–17 (Vaggione, pp. 54–55). In chapter 19 (3–24), he also explains that such names as "life," "light," and "power" should be understood this way, and the light, power, and life of the Unbegotten is different in the case of the begotten, since they name different substances.

or posterity, and without any change and order. It is obvious that all those expressions are in fact negative statements explaining the name "Unbegotten," which is claimed to be a non-negative one.

It can also be seen in the fragment where Eunomius summarizes his first way. After the passage, which establishes the two ways, he makes a quick exposition of the first way by saying:

> "For if anyone begins his enquiry from the essences, he finds that essence which transcends all authority and is wholly incapable of undergoing generation - the essence that gives instruction in these things to the mind approaching them with good will - that essence commands him to reject any comparison with another as being wholly foreign to the law of its nature. As a consequence he is also brought to recognize that its action too conforms to the dignity of its nature."[534]

The substance which is found at the beginning of this way is above authority, incapable of generation, and its proper understanding does not allow for any comparison with another. Therefore, although it is somehow known to man, thanks to the revealed name "Unbegotten," it can be described best in a negative way. It seems that the activity of this substance, since it must be conformed to it, can be also described according to what we can say about the substance, so this passage also suggests that the best way to conceive the activity is negative. So, although Eunomius is usually perceived as a strong opponent of negative theology,[535] he cannot express his view without negative expressions.

Since the description of the substance is practically negative, it seems that the only justification of the claim that we can know the essence of God in a positive way is the theory of names. This theory is based on the claim that no man can give any name to any essence. As Eunomius explains in the fragments of *Apologia Apologiae* quoted by Gregory of Nyssa, the words do not come from poets or authors of the Bible. Even the naming of animals by Adam (Gen 2: 19–20) was not the activity of

---

534 LA 20, 10–15. Εἴτε γὰρ ἐκ τῶν οὐσίων ποιοῖτό τις τῆς ἐπισκέψεως τὴν ἀρχήν, ἡ έν ἀνωτέρω βασιλείας καὶ πάντη γενέσεως ἀνεπίδεκτος οὖσα, τούτοις τε παιδεύουσα τὴν μετ' εὐνοίας προσιοῦσαν διάνοιαν, ἀπωθεῖν ὡς πορρωτάτω παρακελεύεται νόμῳ φύσεως τὴν πρὸς ἕτερον σύγκρισιν, ἀκόλουθον καὶ προσήκουσαν τῷ τῆς οὐσίας ἀξιώματι παρέχουσα νοεῖν καὶ τὴν ἐνέργειαν (Vaggione, pp. 58–61).

535 *Cf.* R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

man, but rather of Adam as the type of Christ.[536] If the names of creations are not of human origin, the name "Unbegotten" must be even more precedent to human invention, since God was unbegotten even before the creation of man. Eunomius relies here on a rather weak claim that the name giver must have existed prior to named things.[537] But such a position is true only when we accept the previous assumption, that a name signifies and reveals the essence, so such argumentation seems to contain a logical flaw. Therefore, if God Himself is the sole name giver, he must have taught them to man. As F. DelCogliano notes, Eunomius seems to imagine this teaching as a kind of a dialogue between God and first human beings,[538] but this is another weak point of his naturalist theory of names, because his explanations of how such conversation could look like are very unclear.[539] Therefore, the entire attempt to tie the name with the essence is based on the naming activity of God. Although it could be perceived as very pious, it is very unconvincing, and Eunomius is unable to prove it not only on the ground of pure reasoning, but also by using biblical passages, which he must interpret in a very strange fashion.

Finally, we must note that the first way of theology was probably Eunomius' own invention, because it is hard to find any previous attempts to recognize the activity of God based on the knowledge of His substance. Such a method seems to be impossible to invent apart from the theory of names which supports it, so once again, we must assume that the entire demonstration relies on the theory of names, which makes the first way possible.

536 Gregory of Nyssa, CE II, 414–416 (GNO I, 347–348); 444 (GNO I, 356).
537 *Cf.* DelCogliano, *op. cit.*, pp. 44–45.
538 *Cf. ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
539 Gregory of Nyssa points this out in: CE II, 398 (GNO I, 342); II, 417 (GNO I, 348). It is also worth noting that Eunomius seems to think that bestowal of names is the work of Divine Providence and its rejection undermines the very existence of providence, and makes Basil equal to Epicurus: CE II, 195–196 (GNO I, 281–282).

4.4.2 The second method – from activity to substance

Eunomius begins the discussion on the second way by claiming that the starting point for the demonstration are the things that are created (τῶν δημιουργημάτων). Then he says:

> "…is led up to the essences and from them discovers that the Son is the 'thing made' of the Unbegotten, while the Counsellor is that of the Only-begotten. Thus, having confirmed the difference in their activities from the pre-eminence of the Only-begotten, he accepts as indisputable the proof that their essences are distinct as well."[540]

So in the demonstration, the created things lead to the essences and the conclusion is that the Son was created by the Father, and the Holy Spirit by the Son, but it is the difference of the activities (τῆς ἐνεργείας διαφορά) which can confirm that the essences are different. Eunomius states that in order to accept such conclusion, there is no need to add that the Father creates through his own power, while the Son creates at the Father's command.[541] Although he is convinced that the difference between the activities is obvious, in this last statement he provides the real difference between them, since the Father's activity is His own, whereas the Son's is made at the command of the Father. Therefore, one should not ascribe the same goods to essences, actions, authorities and names (οὐσίας, ἐνεργείας, ἐξουσίας, ὀνόματος) of the Father and the Son, because this leads to speaking of the two Unbegottens.[542]

In the next section Eunomius argues that neither it is possible even to speak of the similarity (ὁμοιότητος) of things listed above, because multiple fragments of the Holy Scripture read that He is the only (μόνος) God, alone mighty, wise, only immortal[543] and He could not be "only" if His nature would be the same or even similar (ὁμοιότητα τῆς φύσεως) to the nature of any other being.

The consideration of those things leads once again to the confirmation of a difference between the activity of God and man:

---

540 LA 20, 16–19. ἐκ τούτων ἐπὶ τὰς οὐσίας ἀνάγοιτο, τοῦ μὲν ἀγεννήτου τὸν Υἱὸν εὑρίσκων ποίημα, τοῦ δὲ Μονογενοῦς τὸν Παράκλητον, κἀκ τῆς τοῦ Μονογενοῦς ὑπεροχῆς τὴν τῆς ἐνεργείας διαφορὰν πιστούμενος, ἀναμφισβήτητον λαμβάνει καὶ τῆς κατ' οὐσίαν παραλλαγῆς τὴν ἀπόδειξιν (Vaggione, pp. 60–61).

541 LA 20, 20–22 (Vaggione, pp. 60–61).

542 LA 21, 1–4 (Vaggione, pp. 60–61).

543 LA 21, 10–22, 22, 5 (Vagione, pp. 60–61).

> “we must understand that God’s mode of action too is not human, but effortless and divine, and must by no means suppose that that action is some kind of division or motion of his essence.”[544]

At this point Eunomius begins his most important passage concerning the understanding of the activity of God. He draws attention to the problem of the unity of activity and essence, refuting it as the opinion of Hellenes:

> “This is in fact what those who have been led astray by pagan sophistries do have to suppose, because they have united the action to the essence and therefore present the world as coeval with God.”[545]

Eunomius underlines that the conception of the unity of substance and activity leads to absurdity (τὴν ἀτοπίαν) – to a conclusion that the generative action of God has no beginning and no end.[546] That would mean that creation is coeval with God. We find similar statements rejecting the identity of essence and activity in one of the preserved fragments of scholia on Aetius’ *Syntagmation*,[547] to which we shall come back later, but an important question is why Eunomius was convinced that the claim of the identity of substance and activity is of Hellenic origin. The statement that this is the claim of those who have been led astray by Hellenic sophistries (Ἑλλήνων σοφίσμασιν) could simply be a kind of a rhetorical expression, but it could also refer to specific philosophical opinions. We have seen above that direct claims on the unity of substance and activity in the case of God were made already by Aristotle in *Metaphysics*,[548] and they were developed and extended to all intellectual substances by Plotinus.[549] Perhaps, Eunomius is convinced that those opinions were accepted by his Orthodox opponents,

---

544 LA 22, 7–9. τὴν δὲ περὶ τούτων ἔννοιαν ἀκριβῶς διακαθαίροντας καὶ τὸν τῆς ἐνεργείας τρόπον οὐκ ἀνθρώπειον νομίζειν, εὐμαρῆ δὲ καὶ θεῖον· οὔτοι μερισμὸν ἢ κίνησίν τινα τῆς οὐσίας τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἡγουμένους (Vaggione, pp. 62–63).

545 LA 22, 10–12. ἅπερ ἐπινοεῖν ἀναγκαῖον τοὺς ὑπαγομένους τοῖς Ἑλλήνων σοφίσμασιν, ἑνούντων τῇ οὐσίᾳ τὴν ἐνέργειαν καὶ διὰ τοῦθ’ ἅμα μὲν τῷ θεῷ τὸν κόσμον ἀποφαινομένων (Vaggione, pp. 62–63).

546 LA 22, 13–15 (Vaggione, pp. 62–63).

547 *Frag.* I, (Vaggione, pp. 176–177).

548 *Met.* XII, 6, 1071 b, 17–20.

549 As it has been shown above, Plotinus made this move in the first treatise of the sixth *Ennead*, especially in VI, 2, 15, 6–18, and later on about the activity of will which is identical with essence VI, 8, 13, 50–59.

and for him, this meant the rejection of God's creative power and denial of His transcendence. Therefore, he accuses his opponents of the deliberately false teaching, which is the result of depravation of their intellect (κακόνοια).[550]

On the other hand, Eunomius states that:

> "We ourselves, however, judge the activity from its effects in accordance with the principles enunciated just a moment ago, and do not consider it unhazardous to have to unite the activity to the essence. We recognize that the divine essence is without beginning, simple, and endless, but we also recognize that its activity is neither without beginning nor without ending. It cannot be without beginning, for, if it were, its effect would be without beginning as well."[551]

The generative activity of God must have a beginning and an end, whereas His essence must be deprived of them. Otherwise, we would have to admit that the activity which is the same with the substance must be unbegotten and unending in itself (ἀτελεύτητον λέγειν τὴν ἐνέργειαν).[552] For Eunomius, this leads to ridiculous conclusions that "either the activity of God is unproductive or its effect is unbegotten."[553] Therefore, the only remaining option is Eunomius' own point of view. We can also find here a difference with the conclusions which we have made above about Aristotle' teaching of activity. He described ἐνέργεια as being atemporal and having its own end in itself.[554] Eunomius, on the other hand, claims that the activity of the generation of the Son must have the point where it began, and also must have its end in the creation of the separate substance of the Son.

Having discussed the need of the beginning and the end of generation, Eunomius presents the next characteristic point of his understanding of ἐνέεργεια. The generative activity of God must be the act of His will:

---

550 LA 23, 3 (Vaggione, p. 62).

551 LA 23, 4–7. ἡμεῖς δὲ κατὰ τὰ μικρῷ πρόσθεν ῥηθέντα τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων κρίνοντες, οὐκ ἀσφαλὲς οἰόμεθα δεῖν ἑνοῦν τῇ οὐσίᾳ, τὴν μὲν ἄναρχον ἁπλῆν τε καὶ ἀτελεύτητον εἰδότες, τὴν δ᾽ ἐνέργειαν οὐκ ἄναρχον — (ἦ γὰρ ἂν ἦν καὶ τὸ ἔργον ἄναρχον)… (Vaggione, pp. 62–63).

552 LA 23, 9–10 (Vaggione, pp. 62–65).

553 LA 23, 11–12. ἢ τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἄπρακτον εἶναι τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ τὸ ἔργον ἀγέννητον (Vaggione, pp. 64–65).

554 *Cf.* D. Bradshaw, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

> "On the contrary, we must believe that the action which is the truest and the most befitting God is his will (βούλησιν), and that that will is sufficient to bring into existence and to redeem all things, as indeed the prophetic voice bears witness: 'Whatever he willed to do, he did.' God needs nothing in order to bring what he intends into existence; rather, at the same moment he intends it, whatever he willed comes to be."[555]

As we have seen when discussing negative theology of Arius, he also claimed that generation of the Son is the activity of will. Eunomius shares the same opinion that the act of generation of the Son must have been wanted by God. After what has been said on the philosophical concepts of the activity of God, we can see that they presented it primarily as the activity of the intellect. Such activity cannot have a starting point because of substantial actuality of God, who is always actual, and there is no passage from potency to act in Him, as we have seen in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.[556] Therefore, when Plotinus considers activity of will, he also states that this activity must be identical with essence and thus eternal as the One Himself. This activity could neither have started at some point, but here we could see the problem which seems to be present in his discussion. In the case of will, it is easier to see the starting point of activity, and it is not as spontaneous as thinking. Even in comparison with our own thinking and willing, we can see that while thinking is usually spontaneous, willing is more often deliberate. That is why Plotinus says that the One is not "<what happened to be>, but what He has willed to be>."[557]

For Eunomius, the activity of God is primarily that of the will, and he only vaguely discusses the cognitive activity of the Father. He could have thought that while the philosophers discussed primarily the operation of the intellect of God, the true Christian view of God who creates the universe must be different; his primary activity should be rather that of the will. He

555 LA 23, 16–20. ἀληθεστάτην δὲ καὶ Θεῷ πρεπωδεστάτην ἐνέργειαν ἡγεῖσθαι τὴν βούλησιν, ἀρκοῦσαν πρός τε τὸ εἶναι καὶ σώζεσθαι τὰ πάντα, μαρτυρούσης καὶ προφητικῆς φωνῆς «Πάντα γὰρ ὅσα ἠθέλησεν ἐποίησεν.» Οὐ γὰρ ἐπιδέεταί τινος πρὸς τὴν ὧν βούλεται σύστασιν, ἀλλ' ἅμα τε βούλεται καὶ γέγονεν ὅπερ ἠθέλησεν (Vaggione, pp. 64–65).

556 *Cf. Met*. XII, 6, 1071 b, 17–20; XII, 7, 1072 b, 26–29.

557 *Enn*. VI, 8, 13, 59. ὥστε οὐκ ὅπερ ἔτυχέν ἐστιν, ἀλλ' ὅπερ ἐβουλήθη αὐτός (Henry/Schwyzer, vol. 3, p. 258; tr. MacKenna/Page, p. 349).

is the one who created the universe, which came to being from nothing, and not, as Eunomius insisted, from a pre-existing receptacle. Therefore, the universe is not created spontaneously, does not flow from Him, but rather it must have been wanted by God and created by the act of His will, which is the activity "most befitting God."

But Eunomius does not stop here and explains further the character of the activity of will. He claimed earlier that activity must be different from substance, but if it is so, a question arises how exactly the ontological status of such activity should be understood. Eunomius tries to make it clearer by saying:

> "Accordingly, if this argument has demonstrated that God's will is an action, and that this action is not essence but that the Only-begotten exists by virtue of the will of the Father, then of necessity it is not with respect to the essence but with respect to the action (which is what the will is) that the Son preserves his similarity to the Father."[558]

Although Eunomius is not clear about it, we can see that the generative act of will, which is not identical with essence, seems to be a kind of an entity between the Father and the Son. Therefore, the similarity of the Son to the Father is not a simple similarity of one substance to another, but rather the similarity of the substance of the Son, to the activity of the will of the Father.[559] Making such a claim, Eunomius tries to preserve his opinion on dissimilarity of substances, and based on this principle, he goes further with an explanation how to understand the Son as the "image" (εἰκών) of the Father. He uses here the same scheme by saying that the Son is not the image of the Father, but rather the image of the activity of the Father.

This is a very important fragment because Eunomius attempts to reconcile the doctrine of generation of the Son with the understanding of creation of all other beings, and to show what is the difference between those two creative acts:

---

558 LA 24, 1–4. Οὐκοῦν εἰ τὴν μὲν βούλησιν ἀπέδειξεν ὁ λόγος ἐνέργειαν, οὐκ οὐσίαν δὲ τὴν ἐνέργειαν, ὑπέστη δὲ βουλήσει τοῦ πατρὸς ὁ μονογενής, οὐ πρὸς τὴν οὖσίαν, πρὸς δὲ τὴν ἐνέργειαν (ἥτις ἐστί καὶ βούλησις) ἀποσῴζειν τὴν ὁμοιότητα τὸν υἱόν ἀναγκαῖον (Vaggione, pp. 64–65).

559 As M.R. Barnes notices, this also means essence itself is deprived of any kind of causality, *cf. Power of God. Δύναμις in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology*, Washington 2001, pp. 177–178.

> "The word 'image', then, would refer the similarity back, not to the essence of God, but to the action unbegottenly stored up in his foreknowledge prior to the existence of the first-born and of the things created 'in him'."[560]

Eunomius does not explain what he has in mind when he mentions the action which was stored in the foreknowledge of the Father (τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἐναποκειμένην ἀγεννήτως τῇ προγνώσει), but the text seems to suggest that there was only one activity of will, the same with creation and generation, and, therefore, the power of the Father (τοῦ πατρὸς δύναμιν) can be seen in the Son.[561] In the following passages concerning the Holy Spirit, Eunomius also talks about the sequence of creation. The Father generated (created) the Son, but the Son created the Holy Spirit "at the command of the Father by the activity of the Son."[562] So there is an order of creating subsequent persons of the Son and the Spirit.[563] Therefore, generation of the Son would be the only activity of the Father, the creation of the Holy Spirit – one activity of the Son, and so on. Such an interpretation of creation would be most supportive for Eunomius' claims as regards knowing substance from activity. As we have seen in the fragments from *Protrepticus*, Aristotle made similar claims as to a simple being, which, because of its simplicity, can have only one activity.[564] But in one of the preserved fragments of the scholia, Eunomius clearly denies such an interpretation. It begins with rejecting the identity of the substance and will of God:

> '…because the will and the purpose of God are not identical (ταὐτόν) with his essence: the act of willing has both a beginning and an ending.'[565]

And in the next passage of this fragment, he adds:

---

560 LA 24, 10–13. οὐ πρὸς τὴν οὐσίαν φέροι ἂν ἡ εἰκὼν τὴν ὁμοιότητα, πρὸς δὲ τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἐναποκειμένην ἀγεννήτως τῇ προγνώσει καὶ πρὸ τῆς πρωτοτόκου συστάσεως καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ κτισθέντων (Vaggione, pp. 64–65).

561 LA 24, 15 (Vaggione, p. 64).

562 LA 25, 23 (Vaggione, pp. 68–69). προστάγματι τοῦ πατρός, ἐνεργείᾳ δὲ τοῦ υἱοῦ γενόμενον.

563 LA 25, 10–11 (Vaggione, pp. 66–67).

564 *Protrep*. 64, 1–3, Τοῦ μὲν οὖν συνθέτου καὶ μεριστοῦ πλείους καὶ διάφοροί εἰσιν ἐνέργειαι, τοῦ δὲ τὴν φύσιν ἁπλοῦ καὶ μὴ πρός τι τὴν οὐσίαν ἔχοντος μίαν ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι τὴν καθ' αὑτὸ κυρίως ἀρετήν.

565 *Frag*. I, 1–3 Ὅτι ἡ θέλησις καὶ ἡ βούλησις οὐ ταὐτὸν τῇ οὐσίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ· ἡ μὲν γὰρ θέλησις καὶ ἄρχεται καὶ παύεται (Vaggione, pp. 176–177).

> "Besides, if the purpose of God were identical (ταὐτόν) with his essence, then, since there is only one essence, there would have to be only one act of willing."[566]

But, as Eunomius notes, this is inconsistent with the Holy Scripture which reads that God wills many things (Ps 113:11) and as *The Book of Genesis* states, during the days of creation, God subsequently willed the heavens, the Sun and the Earth (Gen. 1: 1–2). Therefore, there are multiple acts of His will, which does not destroy the simplicity of God since they are not identical with His substance. Those activities are different from generation, but we can assume that they were made through the Son. Although Eunomius recalls here a fragment of Genesis and claims that this teaching is clear in this context and confirms the multiplicity of activities of will, this does not solve the main problem of how those acts differ from generation of the Son. It seems that Eunomius was aware of the problem, and, therefore, in *Apologia Apologiae*, he tries to explain this distinction by calling generation and creation of the Spirit "characteristic activities" (παρεπομένων ἐνεργειῶν).[567] Such a concept seems to refer to earlier views of activity which is linked with nature in Aristotle and Philo of Alexandria. However, those activities were seen as flowing out of nature, and they were not purposeful in the meaning in which Eunomius understands generation of the Son. Unfortunately, in the preserved fragments, there is no other discussion of the meaning of characteristic activity, and it seems that there is still no clear answer to the question of how and why does generation of the Son, which is in fact creation, differ from all other acts of the creative activity of God. And this is the crucial problem since according to Eunomius, such an activity should be the way to have a clear knowledge of substance.

The final question which must be asked is what we can say about the knowledge of God's substance and the cognition that it is unbegotten. We have seen that the first way of Eunomius relies only on his theory of names. Undermining this theory destroys the conviction that we can have the knowledge of God's essence. But what about the second way? Contrary to the first one, of which we noted that it was probably Eunomius' own invention, the second way is presented widely in the earlier Patristic

566 *Frag.* I, 4–6 εἰ ταὐτὸν ἦν τῇ οὐσία τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ βούλησις, ἐχρῆν μιᾶς οὔσης τῆς οὐσίας, μίαν εἶναι καὶ τὴν θέλησιν· (Vaggione, pp. 176–177).

567 *CE* I, 151, 1–10 (GNO I, 71, 28–72,10; tr. Hall, p. 57).

tradition. But here we can observe another crucial difference. Earlier versions of the second way very clearly pointed at the activities of God which can be perceived in the sensual world and in the soul of man, as a starting point for the demonstration from activity to substance. Eunomius, however, insists that this activity specifically is generation of the Son, and that its very name and character lead to its proper understanding. Therefore, it cannot be conceived in any other way but as the creative activity of will, and since that activity is generation, we can demonstrate from it that the Father is Unbegotten. However, to accept such reasoning, one must be convinced why this activity must be perceived as so very specific, and why does it differ from other creative activities. This is the key distinction since we no longer start from the activities of God perceived in the world, but from generation itself, and Eunomius seems to fail in explaining how he understands it.

But even if we take for granted that we start from generation, there is still one unsolved problem, which will be exploited by Gregory of Nyssa. If the activity of will is different from substance to such an extent that it should be rather understood as a separate entity, it cannot provide the clear perception of the substance of God. To preserve his own view on the dissimilarity of substances, Eunomius treats activity as a kind of a buffer between them but by doing this he weakens his claim on the knowledge of substance from activity.

4.5 Basil of Caesarea on language and comprehensibility of God

The first of the two ways of theology presented by Eunomius had one profound weakness. To follow the reasoning which starts from substance and leads to the activity of generation, one must previously know the essence, which is revealed by the name (ἀγέννητος). Therefore, the effectiveness of the first way is based on the assumption that names give us the direct knowledge about substance. The polemic with this claim is one of the main topics of *Contra Eunomium*, which being Basil's early work is at the same time one of the most important. The problem of names has been already analysed by scholars since it is the most obvious part of Basil's response to Eunomius' theory. The most important study concerning this topic has been recently

presented by M. DelCogliano,[568] but in order to keep the logic and adequate proportions of the argument, it is impossible to omit this part of the debate, since the connection between names and activities also must be underlined.

The audacious statement that the name 'unbegotten' (ἀγέννητος) reveals the substance of God to us was based by Eunomius on his own preconceptions concerning the theory of names, so in order to abolish the Eunomian main claim, Basil must have also disqualified, perhaps first and foremost, the assumptions underlying Anomean theories. As Basil formulated his theory of names in response to and as part of the polemic with Eunomius, we cannot analyse it separately.

It was Aetius who first came up with an idea that the name 'unbegotten' "communicates the subsistence of God (τὴν ὑπόστασιν τοῦ θεοῦ παρίστησιν),"[569] but it was Eunomius who provided a theoretical background for this claim. He underlines that we cannot use the same names in both orders – divine and mundane – and although the words used to describe both may be the same, they would mean different things.

> "What person of sound mind would not confess that some names have only their pronunciation and utterance in common, but not their meaning? For example, when 'eye' is said of a human being and God, for the former it signifies a certain part while for the latter it signifies sometimes God's care and protection of righteous, sometimes his knowledge of events. In contrast, the majority of the names [used of God] have different pronunciation but the same meaning. For example, *I Am* [Ex 3:14] and *only true God* [John 17:3]."[570]

The philosophical background of Eunomius' theory was subject to various interpretations, starting with J. Daniélou, who found Neoplatonic inspirations there,[571] through L. Wickham[572] and J. Rist,[573] who listed stoic

568 M. DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names*, *op. cit.*

569 Aetius, *Synt.* 12; M. DelCogliano, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

570 LA 16, 9-17, 3 (Vaggione, pp. 53–55).

571 J. Daniélou, *Eunome l'Arien et l' exégèse néo-platonicienne du Cratyle*, *op. cit.*, pp. 412–432.

572 L. Wickham, *The Syntagmation of Aetius the Anomean*, JTS vol. 19, no. 1 (1968), p. 558.

573 J. Rist, *Basil's "Neoplatonism": Its Background and Nature*, in: *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*, ed. P. Fedwick, Toronto, 1981, pp. 137–220.

inspirations,[574] and T. Kopecek with his arguments as to Eunomius' links with Medioplatonists, especially Albinus.[575] As DelCogliano noted, the Anomean theory was not a complete system[576] and perhaps this is the reason why researchers encounter so many difficulties. It is, in my opinion, due to the fact that the entire theory was only one of the tools to prove that the Son is unequal to the Father as his substance is different rather than the goal in itself.

Following Aetius, Eunomius believed that the names applied to the Father and the Son reveal their substance: "substance is the very same as that which signified by His name, granted that that the designation applies properly to the essence."[577] As DelCogliano remarks, both Aetius and Eunomius used the words ὑπόστασις and οὐσία in this context. According to them, real knowledge about οὐσία could be acquired through God's names. So, as the consequence, the difference in names means difference in substance.[578] As a matter of fact, at the beginning, Eunomius claimed that names operate in fundamentally different ways in the divine and mundane context,[579] but he changed his mind when answering Basil's arguments and started to claim, as Gregory of Nyssa refers, that not only the name of God, but any other name reveals the substance, which means that he based the theory of names on the fact that God Himself had given all names and therefore there is a natural connection between an object and its name.[580] In opposition to the biblical account, Eunomius claimed that it was impossible for man to name thing as this is the role of God Himself to give names according to the nature of beings. So Eunomius finally connected the theory of names with the theory of the origin of names, which is an example of the naturalist theory.

574 For a short resume of the history of interpretation, *Cf*. D. Birjukov, *Strategies of Naming in the Polemic between Eunomius and Basil of Cesarea in the Context of the Philosophical Tradition of Antiquity*, Scrinum vol. IV (2008), pp. 104–121.

575 T.A. Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, *op. cit*., pp. 321, 328–332.

576 *Cf*. M. DelCogliano, *op. cit*., p. 35.

577 LA 12, 7–9. οὐχ ἕτερον μὲν τὴν οὐσίαν νοοῦντες, ἕτερον δε τι παρ᾽ αὐτὴν τὸ σημαινόμενον, ἀλλ᾽αὐτὴν εἶναι τὴν ὑπόστασιν ἣν σημαίνει τοὔνομα, ἐπαληθευούσης τῇ οὐσίᾳ τῆς προσηγορίας˙ (Vaggione, p. 49).

578 *Cf*. M. DelCogliano, *op. cit*., pp. 34–35.

579 *Ibid*., p. 43.

580 *Ibid*., p. 44.

When undermining the value of human cognition, Eunomius wrote that every cognition with human effort is done κατ΄ἐπίνοιαν, so each act of conceptualization involves a manipulation of an item and some kind of fabrication.[581] "Unbegotten is based neither on invention nor on privation."[582] So Eunomius denied that we can know God by conceptualization (μήτε ἐν ἐπίνοιαν),[583] but still we can know the notion, the concept (ἐννοία) of unbegottenness. Eunomius at the same time boasts of the knowledge of the οὐσία and denies human competence of cognition.

Basil's answer is systematic as he deals with the heterodox theses point by point. He begins with the disqualification of his opponent's views regarding conceptualization,[584] the method of creating names, as Eunomius believed that it was not a proper way to think of, speak of, and worship God. In his opinion, "Expressions based on invention have their existence in name and utterance only, and by their nature are dissolved along with the sound [which make them up]."[585] Eunomius claims that the things that are said by way of conceptualization (κατ΄ἐπίνοιαν) do not exist only in names and have no link to the nature but are "something completely false and non-existent like the fictional centaurs and Chimaera that appear in the mythologies."[586] According to Basil, conceptualization can give us certain knowledge. This is the knowledge based on sensual cognition: "through conceptualization into the things out of which it is constituted: color, shape, solidity, size, and so forth."[587] But he admits also that using his imagination, man can create notions that have no connection with reality but

> "The term 'conceptualization', however, is far from being restricted only to vain and non-existent imaginations. After an initial concept has arisen for us from sense perception, the more subtle and precise reflection on what we have conceived is called conceptualization."[588]

581 A. Radde-Gallwitz, *op. cit.*, p. 99.
582 LA 8, 10–11 (Vaggione, p. 42).
583 LA 8, 14 (Vaggione, p. 42).
584 *Cf.* Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, Berkeley 1994, pp. 108–116.
585 LA 8, 3–5 (Vaggione pp. 42–43).
586 *Con. Eun.* I, 6, 5–9 (SC 299, p. 184; tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz p. 97).
587 *Con. Eun.* I, 6, 25–29 (SC 299, p. 184; tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz p. 98).
588 *Ibid.*

As A. Radde Gallwitz remarks, each concept devised through ἐπίνοιαν is at least potentially meaningful, but it is not necessary for it to have a referent beyond itself, in the real world. Basil understands that the conditions for meaningfulness are much lesser than the conditions for reference.[589] Additionally, D. Birjukov noted that the views on the language structure presented in the polemic with Eunomius correspond with Aristotle's threefold scheme: sound–thought–subject.[590]

For Basil, it is not only an adequate way to talk about the mundane reality, but about the divine one as well.

> "When our Lord Jesus Christ spoke about himself to make known both the Divinity's love of humanity and the grace that comes to humanity from the economy, he did so by means of certain distinguishing marks considered in connection with him. He called himself 'door', 'way', 'bread', 'vine', 'shepherd', and 'light', even though he is not a polyonym. All these names do not carry the same meaning as one another. For 'light' signifies one thing, 'vine' another, 'way' another, and 'shepherd' yet another. Though our Lord is one in substrate, and one substance, simple and not composite, he calls himself by different names at different times, using designations that differ from one another for the different conceptualizations (ἐπινοίαις διαφερούσας). On the basis of his different activities (ἐνεργειῶν διαφορὰν) and his relation to the objects of his divine benefaction, he employs different names for himself. For instance, when he calls himself 'the light of the world', he points out the inaccessibility of the glory in the divinity."[591]

So the conceptualization of Christ describes Christ's activities and his relations with the created world and the humanity. The names are different

589 *Cf.* A. Radde-Gallwitz, *op. cit.*, pp. 143–144.

590 *Cf.* D. Birjukov, *op. cit.*, p. 116; *Cf.* Aristotle, *De interpretatione*, 16 a, 26–29.

591 *Con. Eun.* I, 7, 4–19 (SC 299, pp. 188–190). Ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ἐν τοῖς περὶ ἑαυτοῦ λόγοις, τὴν φιλανθρωπίαν τῆς θεότητος καὶ τὴν ἐξ οἰκονομίας χάριν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις παραδηλῶν, ἰδιώμασί τισι τοῖς περὶ αὐτὸν θεωρουμένοις ἀπεσήμαινε ταύτην, θύραν ἑαυτὸν λέγων, καὶ ὁδὸν, καὶ ἄρτον, καὶ ἄμπελον, καὶ ποιμένα, καὶ φῶς, οὐ πολυώνυμός τις ὤν·οὐ γὰρ πάντα τὰ ὀνόματα εἰς ταυτὸν ἀλλήλοις φέρει. Ἄλλο γὰρ τὸ σημαινόμενον φωτὸς, καὶ ἄλλο ἀμπέλου, καὶ ἄλλο ὁδοῦ, καὶ ἄλλο ποιμένος. Ἀλλ' ἓν ὢν κατὰ τὸ ὑποκείμενον, καὶ μία οὐσία καὶ ἁπλῆ καὶ ἀσύνθετος, ἄλλοτε ἄλλως ἑαυτὸν ὀνομάζει, ταῖς ἐπινοίαις διαφερούσας ἀλλήλων τὰς προσηγορίας μεθαρμοζόμενος. Κατὰ γὰρ τὴν τῶν ἐνεργειῶν διαφορὰν, καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὰ εὐεργετούμενα σχέσιν, διάφορα ἑαυτῷ καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα τίθεται. Φῶς μὲν γὰρ ἑαυτὸν τοῦ κόσμου λέγει, τό τε ἀπρόσιτον τῆς ἐν τῇ θεότητι δόξης τῷ ὀνόματι τούτῳ διασημαίνων (tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, p. 99).

as different are His activities that can be recognized. Further on, Basil lists some other names of God, such as 'creator', 'wise', 'provident', 'invisible', and 'unchangeable'[592] that can be derived from certain passages of the Scripture which are treated as encapsulating basic notions about God.[593]

> "For we say that the God of the universe is 'incorruptible' and 'unbegotten', designating him with these names according to various aspects. Whenever we consider ages past, we find that the life of God transcends every beginning and say that he is 'unbegotten'. Whenever we stretch our mind forward to the ages to come, we designate the one who is without boundary, infinite, and comprehended by no terminal point as 'incorruptible'. Therefore, just as 'incorruptible' is the name we give him because his life is without an end, so too is 'unbegotten' the name given because his life is without a beginning, when we consider each through conceptualization."[594]

According to Basil, with the help of all available means of cognition, that is, sense perception, common sense, and scriptural tradition, man can, through the process of conceptualization, create notions about the earthly phenomena and spiritual matters.

> "And if anyone should examine each of the names one by one, he would find the various conceptualizations, even though for all there is one substrate (οὐσιαν) as far as substance (ὑποκειμένου) is concerned."[595]

Basil does not agree with Eunomius that we can treat different names as equivalent to the essence and as a consequence, basing on God's simplicity, to each other. On the contrary, he claims that:

> "For if he [Eunomius] does not consider anything at all by way of conceptualization so as to avoid the appearance of honoring God with human designations, then

---

592 *Cf. Con. Eun.* I. 7, 35 (SC 299, p. 192).
593 *Cf.* M. DelCogliano, *op. cit.*, p. 171.
594 *Con. Eun.* I, 7 (SC 299, p. 192). Ἄφθαρτον γὰρ καὶ ἀγέννητον εἶναι τὸν Θεὸν τῶν ὅλων λέγομεν, κατὰ διαφόρους ἐπιβολὰς τοῖς ὀνόμασι τούτοις προσ-αγορεύοντες. Ὅταν μὲν γὰρ εἰς τοὺς κατόπιν αἰῶνας ἀποβλέψωμεν, ὑπερεκπίπτουσαν πάσης ἀρχῆς εὑρίσκοντες τὴν ζωὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀγέννητον αὐτὸν λέγομεν· ὅταν δὲ τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις αἰῶσι τὸν νοῦν ἐπεκτείνωμεν, τὸν ἀόριστον καὶ ἄπειρον, καὶ οὐδενὶ τέλει καταληπτὸν προσαγορεύομεν ἄφθαρτον. Ὡς οὖν τὸ ἀτελεύτητον τῆς ζωῆς ἄφθαρτον, οὕτω τὸ ἄναρχον αὐτῆς ἀγέννητον ὠνομάσθη, τῇ ἐπινοίᾳ θεωρούντων ἡμῶν ἑκάτερα (tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, p. 100).
595 *Con. Eun.* I, 7, 27–29 (SC 299, p. 190; tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, p. 100).

he will confess this: that all things attributed to God similarly refer to his substance. But how is it not ridiculous to say that his creative power is his substance? (…) In other words, how is it not ridiculous to regard every activity (πᾶσαν ἐνέργειαν) of his as his substance?"[596]

But as M. DelCogliano comments, Basil viewed conceptualization as an intellectual process that made the accurate and useful knowledge of a thing possible without comprehension of the thing's essence.[597] Basil's theory is a part of larger 'notionalism' in which all names signify primarily notions, which in turn provide information about non-essential properties of the objects that bear the names.[598] But even though they provide much less than Eunomius claimed, they are still useful for human cognition.

"There is not one name which encompasses the entire nature of God and suffices to express it adequately. Rather, there are many diverse names, and each one contributes, in accordance with its own meaning, to a notion that is altogether dim and trifling as regards the whole but that is at least sufficient for us."[599]

If names created through conceptualization do not give us the knowledge about οὐσία, what is the knowledge that they provide? In order to answer this question, Basil among others distinguishes relational and absolute names.[600]

"Who does not know that some names are expressed absolutely and in respect of themselves, signifying the things which are their referents, but other names are said relative to others, expressing only the relation to the other names relative to which they are said? For example, 'human being' and 'horse' and 'ox' each communicate the very thing that is named. But 'son' and 'slave' and 'friend' reveal only the connection with the associated name."[601]

---

596 *Con. Eun.* I, 8, 19–35 (SC 299, p. 194; tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, p. 101).

597 *Cf.* M. DelCogliano, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

598 *Cf.* M. DelCogliano, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

599 *Con. Eun.* I, 10, 1–5 (SC 299, p. 204). Ἓν μὲν οὐδέν ἐστιν ὄνομα ὃ πᾶσαν ἐξαρκεῖ τὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ φύσιν περιλαβὸν, ἱκανῶς ἐξαγγεῖλαι· πλείω δὲ καὶ ποικίλα κατ' ἰδίαν ἕκαστον σημασίαν, ἀμυδρὰν μὲν παντελῶς καὶ μικροτάτην, ὡς πρὸς τὸ ὅλον, ἡμῖν γε μὴν ἐξαρκοῦσαν τὴν ἔννοιαν συναθροίζει (tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, p. 105); *Cf. Ep.* 234, 1 (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 41).

600 *Cf. Con. Eun.* II, 9, 11–13 (SC 305, p. 36).

601 *Con. Eun.* II, 9, 11–18 (SC 305, p. 36). Ἐπεὶ τίς οὐκ οἶδεν, ὅτι τῶν ὀνομάτων τὰ μὲν ἀπολελυμένως καὶ καθ' ἑαυτὰ προφερόμενα τῶν ὑποκειμένων αὐτοῖς πραγμάτων ἐστὶ σημαντικὰ, τὰ δὲ πρὸς ἕτερα λεγόμενα τὴν σχέσιν μόνην ἐμφαίνει

According to D.G. Robertson, this distinction is made to strengthen the argument for the view that names cannot fully express substance; since absolute names cannot adequately express substance, then even less can relative names do so.[602] But they still give us a kind of knowledge about the relationships in which those beings participate. Those relationships (especially between the Father and the Son) become for Basil the modes of being of those persons. The Father is from the very beginning situated in a relationship with the Son. We can link this way of thinking with Aristotelian inspiration.[603] And, as D.G. Robertson remarks, Basil underlines that we should not mistake relative terms with contraries as Eunomius does.[604]

But the most convincing arguments against the close association of names with substance are given by Basil when he discusses the distinction between common and proper names, that is names given to individual beings. This division is inherited from Stoics, whose definitions included two types of names: common names and proper names.[605]

> "But what sane person would agree with this logic that there must be a difference of substances for those things whose names are distinct? For the designations of Peter and Paul and of all people in general are different, but there is a single substance for all of them. For this reason, in most respects we are the same as one another, but it is only due to the distinguishing marks considered in connection with each one of us that we are different, each from the other."[606]

τὴν πρὸς ἃ λέγεται; Οἷον, ἄνθρωπος μὲν, καὶ ἵππος, καὶ βοῦς, αὐτὸ ἕκαστον τῶν ὀνομαζομένων παρίστησιν· υἱὸς δὲ, ἢ δοῦλος, ἢ φίλος, μόνης τῆς πρὸς τὸ συνεζευγμένον ὄνομα συναφείας ἐστὶ δηλωτικά (tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, p. 142).

602 D.G. Robertson, *Relatives in Basil of Caesarea*, SP 37 (2001), p. 279.

603 Cf. B. Sesbüé, *Introduction*, in: Basil de Césarée, *Contre Eunome*, *op. cit.*, SC 299, p. 81.

604 *Cf.* D.G. Robertson, *Relatives in Basil of Caesarea*, *op. cit.*, p. 286; *Con. Eun.* II, 27, 26–33 (SC 305, p. 114).

605 D.G. Robertson. *A Patristic Theory of Proper Names*, AGPh, vol. 84 (2002), p. 4.

606 *Con. Eun.* 2, 4, 27–31 (SC 305, p. 20). Καίτοι γε, εἴπερ ἀληθὲς ἦν, ὅτι ὧν τά ὀνόματα διενήνοχεν, ἐναντίως ἔχουσιν αἱ οὐσίαι, ἐχρῆν δή που καὶ Παῦλον καὶ Πέτρον καὶ ἀπαξαπλῶς ἀνθρώπους ἅπαντας ἑτεροουσίους ἀλλήλοις εἶναι. Ἐπεὶ δὲ τοῦτο οὐδεὶς οὕτως ἀμαθὴς καὶ τῆς κοινῆς φύσεως ἀνεπίσκεπτος ὥστ᾽ ἂω εἰπεῖν προαχθῆναι. (tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, p. 134).

Individual designations are based on the distinguishing marks which are in an obvious way external to the common substance, and names are not the 'semantics' (σημαντιαί) of substance.

Proper names refer to the qualities and features that individual men have, and according to those qualities and features, we are able to distinguish men from each other. It is, then, obvious that different names for objects which have common substance do not all have the same meaning. While analysing this fragment, D.G. Robertson remarks that in contrast to his opponent, Eunomius thinks that names mean substances understood as individuals.[607] But Basil uses this very important distinction to show that there are properties that mark out distinction (ἰδιώματα) between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the simple and undivided divine substance, and such words as 'Father' and 'Son' which are relational, similar to 'master' and 'slave'.[608] So proper names are linked with relational names here.

> "So, then, what I have said makes it clear that in the case of both 'Father' and 'Son' the names do not communicate substance (οὐχὶ οὐσίαν παρίστησι) but instead are revelatory of the distinguishing marks (ἰδιωμάτων)."[609]

Basil reminds that even the Bible shows us different properties – names of God[610] and on various examples, he explains that combinations of many different names can give us some notions about the divinity.

> "If anyone wants to accept that which is true, namely, that begotten and unbegotten are distinctive features that enable identification and are observed in the substance, which lead to the clear and unconfused notion of the Father and the Son, then he will escape the danger of impiety and preserve logical coherence in his reasoning. (…) For example, the divinity is common, whereas fatherhood and sonship are distinguishing marks: from the combination of both, that is, of the common and the unique, we arrive at comprehension of the truth."[611]

So in *Contra Eunomium*, Basil discusses four kinds of names in order to refute Eunomius' theory of names, which are proper names, absolute names, relative names, and finally names that M. DelCogliano calls "derived"

---

607 *Cf.* D.G. Robertson, *A Patristic Theory of Proper Names*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
608 D.G. Robertson, *Relatives in Basil of Caesarea*, *op. cit.*, p. 277.
609 *Con. Eun.* II, 5, 1–3 (SC 305, p. 22; tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, p. 136).
610 *Cf. Con. Eun.* I, 8, 27–45 (SC 299, pp. 194–196).
611 *Con. Eun.* II, 28, 27–37 (SC 305, pp. 118–120; tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, p. 174).

names, because they name conceptualizations. And in each case, Basil advances a consistent notionalist theory in which a name gives rise to a mental notion whose content is the properties of substance.[612] For Eunomius, terms have immediate access to substance; for Basil, it is the clue to the understanding that the notions are between names and beings. The terms that the humans have devised by reflecting on more basic concepts of God are all that can be known in this life, but still it is not a full and adequate portrait of God.[613] Each name contributes in its own way to our understanding of God, and owing to this argumentation, Basil's theory of names will support theological epistemology and create the possibility for a more comprehensive knowledge of God than that Eunomius' claimed to possess.[614]

It must be also remarked that in his polemic with Eunomius, commenting on his *Apology*, Basil omitted chapters 21–24. When we look at those missing chapters, they are entirely devoted to problems connected with substance and activity. In my opinion, Basil did it deliberately, probably because he could not find counterarguments good enough to reject Eunomius' teaching. We do not know what was the exact text of *Apologia Apologiae*, but we know that the issues presented in the chapters omitted in Basil's *Contra Eunomium* returned and were dealt with in Gregory's interpretation.[615]

4.6 Gregory of Nyssa on knowing the activities and the essence of God

Answering Eunomius, Basil of Caesarea focused his criticism on the theory of names. From the fragments of *Apologia Apologiae* quoted by Gregory of Nyssa, we know that Eunomius tried to defend his position once again and, therefore, Gregory also formulated arguments against his theory.[616] However, in *Contra Eunomium*, the Cappadocian turns his attention to

612 *Cf.* M. DelCogliano, *op. cit.*, p. 189.
613 *Cf.* A. Radde-Gallwitz, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
614 *Cf.* M. DelCogliano, *op. cit.*, p. 152.
615 *Cf.* K. Kochańczyk-Bonińska, *Basil the Great's References to Eunomius*, VP 37 (2017) vol. 68, pp. 125–126.
616 See especially CE II, 414–416 (GNO I, 347–348); 444 (GNO I, 356).

Eunomius' understanding of the distinction between substance and activity, which was only mentioned in Basil's work.

The Anomean's claim on the activities of God was one of the main factors which inspired Gregory of Nyssa to develop the theory of the Divine ἐνέργεια to the extent which is hard to find in the earlier Christian thought.

4.6.1 The ontological status of God's activities

After a long exposition about the historical situation of the controversy and the accusations which Eunomius formulated against Basil's cowardliness, Gregory of Nyssa begins his discussion with a quotation from *Apologia Apologiae*, in which the opponent sustained his claims on the two ways of theology.[617] The discussion on the understanding of activity of God fills a large piece of the central part of the first book of *Contra Eunomium*.

Gregory first turns to the criticism of the names of the Divine Persons which are absent in Eunomius' passage. He recognizes that the absence of the names "Father" and "Son" is deliberate because one can immediately recognize the natural relationship (τῆς φύσεως συγγενές) of the Persons and thus it would undermine Eunomius' reasoning.[618] After a long exposition concerning superiority of the Father and inferiority of the Son, Gregory once again quotes Eunomius: "the activities which accompany the substances and the names appropriate to them being of course treated together"[619] and presents his understanding of this passage:

> "He applies the terms activities of substances, I assume, to the powers effective of the Son and the Holy Spirit, by which the first substance produced the second and the second the third, and he says that the names of the works effected are simultaneously applied as belonging to the works."[620]

---

617 CE I, 151, 1–154, 13 (GNO I, 71, 28–73, 15).

618 CE I, 159, 1–5 (GNO I, 75, 1–6).

619 CE I, 205, 1–3. συμπεριλαμβανομένων δηλαδὴ καὶ τῶν ταῖς οὐσίαις ἑπομένων ἐνεργειῶν καὶ τῶν ταύταις προσφυῶν ὀνομάτων (GNO I, 86, 17–19; tr. Hall, p. 65).

620 CE I, 206, 1–6. ἐνεργείας οὐσιῶν ὀνομάζει τὰς ἀποτελεστικάς, ὡς οἶμαι, τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος δυνάμεις, δι' ὧν ἡ πρώτη οὐσία τὴν δευτέραν εἰργάσατο καὶ ἡ δευτέρα τὴν τρίτην, καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα τῶν ἀποτελεσθέντων ἔργων προσφυῶς συγκατεσκευάσθαι τοῖς ἔργοις φησίν (GNO I, 86, 22–27; tr. Hall, p. 65).

Gregory suggests that Eunomius mistook activities for powers (δυνάμεις), but what is more important he states here that the entire question lies in an examination of the status of the activities, that is:

> "how the activities accompany the substances, and what they are in their own nature, whether something other than the substances they accompany, or part of them and of the same nature; and if they are something else, how or whence they originate, and if they are the same thing, how they come to be cut off and, instead of "coexisting" with them, accompany them externally."[621]

Gregory complains that it is not possible to identify what Eunomius really means when speaking of activities: whether they are the effect of free choice or they follow the substance out of the necessity of nature (ἀνάγκης τινὸς φυσικῆς), as combustion accompanies the nature of fire. However, he rejects the second option because this would mean that activity is a kind of an accident of the subject (συμβεβηκὸς ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ), which in this case could not be understood as a simple one.[622] But such conclusion leads to an even greater confusion, because activity which is the effect of the intended choice (ἐκ πρόνοιας) of God at the same time accompanies (ἕπεται) substance like the external consequence.[623] Gregory notes that normally we do not say that the activity of a worker follows him, but rather:

> "one who speaks of the activity comprehends in the word whatever is active in it, and the one who mentions the agent, precisely by what he leaves unsaid, indicates also the activity."[624]

It can be shown by the examples of naming "metalworker" and "builder," where the name denotes both person and the activity which he performs and those two are conceived together.[625] So even the activity which does arise

621 CE I, 207, 1–6. πῶς ἕπονται ταῖς οὐσίαις αἱ ἐνέργειαι, τί οὖσαι κατὰ τὴν ἰδίαν φύσιν, ἄλλο τι παρὰ τὰς οὐσίας αἷς παρέπονται ἢ μέρος ἐκείνων καὶ τῆς αὐτῆς φύσεως· καὶ εἰ μὲν ἄλλο, πῶς ἢ παρὰ τίνος γενόμεναι, εἰ δὲ τὸ αὐτό, πῶς ἀποτεμνόμεναι καὶ ἀντὶ τοῦ "συνυπάρχειν" αὐταῖς ἔξωθεν παρεπόμεναι (GNO I, 87, 3–8; tr. Hall, p. 65).

622 CE I, 208, 2–11. (GNO I, 87, 10–18).

623 CE I, 209, 1–3. (GNO I, 87, 19–20).

624 CE I, 209, 7–10. ἀλλ' ὁ τὴν ἐνέργειαν εἰπὼν τὸ κατ' αὐτὴν κινούμενον τῷ λόγῳ συμπεριέλαβε, καὶ ὁ τοῦ ἐνεργοῦντος μνησθεὶς καὶ τὴν ἐνέργειαν πάντως κατὰ τὸ σιωπώμενον αὐτῷ συνεσήμηνε (GNO I, 87, 25–88,3; tr. Hall, p. 65).

625 CE I, 210, 1–5 (GNO I, 88, 4–8).

from the necessity of nature cannot exist without substance that performs it. Therefore, activity cannot be treated as subsistent (ψιλὴν ἐνέργειαν), since it is the motion of nature (φύσεως κίνησις) and what subsists is active substance (ἐνεργὸν οὐσίαν).[626] Understanding the activity as subsistent leads to a contradiction, because on one hand, it must be something dependent on the will of the Father, and on the other, it is also independent. After a discussion on the greater and lesser understanding of substances,[627] Gregory returns to the implication of the independence of activity when commenting on Eunomius' words:

"the activities are defined at the same time as their works, and the works match the activities of those who effected them, there is surely every necessity both that the activities accompanying each of the beings are lesser and greater, and that some occupy the first and others the second rank."[628]

Using the example of a leatherworker and his tool, Gregory shows that for Eunomius activity is a kind of a tool (ὄργανον) with which the Father creates the Son and the Son creates the Holy Spirit.[629] Therefore, it must be: "A kind of quasi-substantial power, which subsists by itself and apparently operates by voluntary motion,"[630] and this leads to a conclusion that there are some entities between the Divine Persons. So, in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit must be placed not in the third but in the fifth place.[631] Such a position leads to absurdity, and, therefore, Eunomius simply must admit that activity is non-hypostatic (ἀνυπόστατον), and for Gregory, this means

626 CE I, 211, 7–9 (GNO I, 87, 15–18). It is worth noting that the definition of activity as the "movement of nature" comes from Aristotle. *Cf. Met.* IX, 8, 1050 b, 29–32; *De gen. anim.*, 734 b, 19–735 a, 2.

627 CE I, 225–241 (GNO I, 92, 12–97, 21).

628 CE I, 242, 4–9. συμπεριγραφομένων, φησί, τοῖς ἔργοις τῶν ἐνεργειῶν καὶ τῶν ἔργων ταῖς τῶν ἐργασαμένων ἐνεργείαις παραμετρουμένων, ἀνάγκη δήπου πᾶσα καὶ τὰς ἑκάστῃ τῶν οὐσιῶν ἑπομένας ἐνεργείας ἐλάττους τε καὶ μείζους εἶναι, καὶ τὰς μὲν πρώτην, τὰς δὲ δευτέραν ἐπέχειν τάξιν (GNO I, 97, 24–98, 1; tr. Hall, p. 70).

629 CE I, 245, 1–246, 4 (GNO I, 98, 20–99, 1).

630 CE I, 247, 1–2. δύναμίς τις οὐσιώδης καθ' ἑαυτὴν ὑφεστῶσα καὶ τὸ δοκοῦν ἐργαζομένη δι' αὐτεξουσίου κινήματος. (GNO I, 99, 8–9; tr. Hall, p. 71).

631 CE I, 249, 1–3 (GNO I, 99, 20–21).

that the activity of generation is simply non-being (τὸ μὴ ὄν),[632] which can produce only another non-being.[633]

Gregory summarizes his point in the fragment of *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii*, in which he also gives a definition of activity:

> "Every activity is contemplated as exertion in the party who exhibits it, and when it is completed, it has no independent existence. Thus, for example, the activity of the runner is the motion of his feet, and when the motion has stopped there is no longer any activity. So too about every pursuit the same may be said; - when the exertion of him who is busied about anything ceases, the activity ceases also, and has no independent existence, either when a person is actively engaged in the exertion he undertakes, or when he ceases from that exertion. What then does he tell us that the activity is in itself, which is neither substance, nor image, nor person? So he speaks of the Son as the similitude of the impersonal, and that which is like the non-existent surely has itself no existence at all. This is what his juggling with idle opinions comes to, - belief in nonentity (τὸ μὴ ὄν)! for that which is like nonentity surely itself is not."[634]

Thus activity exists only as an exertion (σπουδαζόμενον) of someone who performs it and cannot have existence of its own. Since it cannot in itself be a substance, an imprinted image or a person (οὔτε οὐσίαν οὖσαν οὔτε χαρακτῆρα οὔτε ὑπόστασιν), when separated from the one who performs its activity can only be named as non-being (τὸ μὴ ὄν). Eunomius' understanding of activity leads to a contradiction that it is separate and has its own existence, while simultaneously it is dependent. Therefore, one must accept

632 CE I, 251, 1–3 (GNO I, 100, 6–9).

633 CE I, 253, 1–7 (GNO I, 100, 23–101, 4).

634 *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii* 159, 4–160, 10. πᾶσα γὰρ ἐνέργεια ἐν μὲν τῷ ἐκπονοῦντι τὸ σπουδαζόμενον θεωρεῖται, περαιωθέντος δὲ τοῦ σπουδαζομένου καθ' ἑαυτὴν οὐχ ὑφέστηκεν· οἷον ἐνέργεια τοῦ δρομέως ἡ διὰ τῶν ποδῶν ἐστι κίνησις, παυσαμένης δὲ τῆς κινήσεως οὐκέτι ἔστιν ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς ἡ ἐνέργεια. οὕτως καὶ ἐπὶ παντὸς ἔστιν ἐπιτηδεύματος τὸ ἴσον εἰπεῖν, τῇ σπουδῇ τοῦ περί τι πονοῦντος συναπολήγειν καὶ τὴν ἐνέργειαν *** ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς δὲ οὐκ οὖσαν οὔτε ἐνεργοῦντός τινος τὴν προκειμένην ἑαυτῷ σπουδὴν οὔτε εἰ τῆς σπουδῆς ἀπολήξειε. τί οὖν λέγει εἶναι καθ' ἑαυτὴν τὴν ἐνέργειαν τὴν οὔτε οὐσίαν οὖσαν οὔτε χαρακτῆρα οὔτε ὑπόστασιν; οὐκοῦν τοῦ ἀνυποστάτου αὐτὸν εἶπεν ὁμοίωμα· τὸ δὲ τῷ ἀνυπάρκτῳ ὅμοιον οὐδὲ αὐτὸ πάντως ἔστιν. αὕτη τῶν καινῶν δογμάτων ἡ τερατεία, τὸ πιστεύειν εἰς τὸ μὴ ὄν. τὸ γὰρ τῷ μὴ ὄντι ὅμοιον οὐκ ἔστι πάντως. (GNO II, 379, 26–380, 10; tr. NPNF II, vol. 5, p. 124, with my own alterations).

Gregory's position that activity cannot exist apart from the substance that performs it.[635]

4.6.2 The criticism of the second way of Eunomius

It seems that demonstrating the dependence of activity on the substance could only strengthen the demonstrative power of Eunomius' second way of theology. If activity is so deeply linked with the substance, it would seem that we can indeed know the substance when we know the activity. But Gregory does not think so, and he addresses his criticism against Eunomius' second way.

The activity which is the exertion of a substance cannot give us any knowledge of the substance itself. Gregory considers two possible ways of understanding the relationship between the two. First, when "substance and activity are found to possess the self-same characteristics and properties."[636] This position, however, must be refuted because there would be no difference between the divine substance and generation, and this would mean that Eunomius agrees with the Orthodox. That is why, he must sustain the second possibility, that substance and activity have different properties. In this case, it is impossible to recognize the substance on the basis of activity:

> "If the definition of substance and activity is not the same, but each means something different, how can conclusions to discussions be reached on the basis of things strange and alien? It is as if in an argument about human nature, discussing whether man is a laughing animal or capable of literacy, someone took as an illustration to prove his point the construction of a house or ship, which the builder or shipwright built, and were then to assert by this clever argument that we know the substances by the activities, and that the activity of a man is the house and the ship. Is this then the way we learn, you silly thing, that man is broad-nailed and able to laugh?"[637]

---

635 *Cf.* G. Maspero, *Energy*, in: *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. L.F. Mateo-Seco, G. Maspero, Leiden, Boston 2010, p. 260.

636 CE I, 419, 6–7. τῆς οὐσίας καὶ ἐνεργείας ἐν τοῖς ἴσοις καὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς γνωρίσμασί τε καὶ ἰδιώμασιν εὑρισκομένων (GNO I, 149, 1–2; tr. Hall, p. 96).

637 CE I, 420, 1–421, 3. εἰ δὲ οὐχ ὁ αὐτὸς τῆς τε οὐσίας καὶ τῆς ἐνεργείας ὁ λόγος, ἀλλὰ διάφορον ἐφ' ἑκατέρου τὸ σημαινόμενον, πῶς διὰ τῶν ξένων καὶ ἀλλοτρίων αἱ ἀποδείξεις τοῖς ζητουμένοις ἐπάγονται; ὥσπερ ἂν εἴ τις, πολυπραγμονουμένης τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης οὐσίας καὶ ζητουμένου εἰ γελαστικὸν ζῷον ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἢ γραμματικῆς δεκτικόν, εἰς ἀπόδειξιν τοῦ προτεθέντος παραλαμβάνοι οἰκίας ἢ

In this case, the product of the activity by which it has been made cannot give us the knowledge of the substance. A ship or a house built by man does not lead us in any demonstration to conceive what human nature is. The same objection can be made with respect to any activity and movement (τινα κίνησιν καὶ ἐνέργειαν) of man, but also when we consider the activity which is intrinsically linked with nature, or as Gregory puts it: "what the activity by its nature actually is."[638] The example of such activity is the movement of wind, since there is no wind when air does not move. The effects of wind's activity could be a dune or a scatter of dust, but those things cannot explain the nature of wind.[639] As we can see, Gregory does not only question the possibility of knowing substance from activity, but he goes even further arguing that it is not true that the product matches the activity. He uses the example of a smith, who in making a gimlet does not use all of his abilities and skills, but only to such extent which is necessary to make this tool. Therefore: "similarly the one brought into being by the activity reveals the extent of the activity (τὸ μέτρον τῆς ἐνεργείας) in himself."[640] But the question in this case does not concern how great the activity is but rather the very substance of the one who acted (τοῦ ἐνεργήσαντος ἡ οὐσία)[641] and, therefore, Eunomius' method fails. Gregory gives us yet another argument of why this method cannot be sound. It must be rejected even if we admit that we can have the knowledge of substance, thanks to activity. Since

πλοίου κατασκευήν, ἣν ὁ οἰκοδόμος ἢ ὁ ναυπηγὸς ἐτεκτήνατο, ἔπειτα ἰσχυρίζοιτο τῷ σοφῷ τούτῳ λόγῳ, ὅτι ταῖς ἐνεργείαις τὰς οὐσίας γνωρίζομεν, ἐνέργεια δὲ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἡ οἰκία καὶ τὸ πλοῖον. ἐκ τούτων ἄρα καταλαμβάνομεν τὸ πλατυώνυχον καὶ γελαστικὸν εἶναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ἁπλούστατε (GNO I, 149, 3–15; tr. Hall, p. 96).

638 CE I, 421, 5–6. αὐτὸ τὸ ἐνεργοῦν τί ποτε κατὰ τὴν φύσιν ἐστίν· (GNO I, 149, 17–18; tr. Hall, p. 96).

639 CE I, 422, 1–5 (GNO I, 149, 19–23). Gergory makes a similar objection in the third book of *Contra Eunomium*, where he considers God as a judge. Making a judgement is the activity, which allows us to claim that God is a judge, but it does not give us the knowledge of the substance of God. Similarly, the knowledge of generation can lead us to a conclusion that God is ungenerated, but this does not mean that we gained the knowledge of the substance of God (CE III, 5, 57–59; GNO II, p. 181).

640 CE I, 424, 11–12 (GNO I, 150, 14–15).

641 CE I, 425, 1–3 (GNO I, 150, 16–18).

Eunomius cannot name any specific activity of the Holy Spirit, his substance would be incomprehensible and, therefore, also the activity of the Son, the Onlybegotten himself, the activity of generation, and finally the substance of the Father.[642] Gregory concludes:

> "Hence there is a clear proof that on our opponents' own evidence the substance of the Father is absolutely beyond apprehension."[643]

Gregory of Nyssa then not only repudiates Eunomius' argument concerning the relationship between substance and activity, but also shows that the sequential conception of the Trinity makes it futile. Therefore, neither the product nor the activities can be a starting point for any demonstration which gives us the apprehension of the substance of God.

4.6.3 The activity of generation and other activities of God

In the next paragraphs, which we cannot follow in full because some fragments are missing, Gregory refers to the last part of Eunomius' exposition on the two ways of theology. He claimed that we can resolve the doubts about activities in reference to the acting substance.[644] It seems that here Eunomius does not speak directly about his first method, because he does not mention the theory of names, but he proposes rather to make his demonstration even firmer by taking a step back from the recognized substance to activity. In his polemic, Gregory points out that any demonstration must start from the commonly accepted statement (ὁμολογούμενον),[645] and since the substance of God is unknown, it is not possible to start any reasoning from it. But the Father is not only the one who generated the Son, but is also the Creator of the Universe. Since there are various opinions on the nature of the sky, the earth and the sea it is impossible to claim that the nature of God can be understood. Eunomius himself claimed that God is

642 CE I, 426, 1–427, 10 (GNO I, 150, 25–151, 15).
643 CE I, 428, 8–429, 1. ὡς ἐκ τούτων σαφῶς ἀποδείκνυσθαι καὶ διὰ τῆς τῶν ἐχθρῶν μαρτυρίας τὸ ἀκατάληπτον εἶναι πάντη τοῦ πατρὸς τὴν οὐσίαν (GNO I, 151, 23–25).
644 CE I, 154, 10–11, τὴν δὲ ἐπὶ ταῖς ἐνεργείαις ἀμφιβολίαν διαλύειν ἐκ τῶν οὐσιῶν (GNO I, 73, 12–13).
645 CE, I, 431, 1–9 (GNO I, 152, 7–16).

immaterial, invisible, without shape, unbegotten, immune to decay, etc.,[646] so Gregory asks:

> "How then will one who has accepted such an idea of the one who was active be led on to the knowledge of the nature of the sky? How will he pass from invisible to visible, from incorruptible to what is subject to decay, from unbegotten being to what is constituted in time, from what always abides to what has acquired temporal existence, and frame his notion of the matter in question on the basis of all that is contrary to it?"[647]

This is a very important fragment since Gregory points out that there are other activities of God which we can recognize in the sensual world. This is not only creation, but also providence, about which he speaks in the next passages,[648] and in the case of those activities, the knowledge of the substance of God from them is even more doubtful. It is not even possible to pass from visible effects to the invisible substance of the cause. As we have seen above, Eunomius was unable to solve the problem of those other activities, and Gregory rightly points out that he avoids speaking of them, as in the case of providence.[649] Neither can we be certain how Eunomius understood those other activities of God; whether the Father could have other activities of his own, or they were all performed through the Son. Nevertheless, since for Eunomius, no activity was the same with the essence of God, there was no possibility of admitting that there is any "internal" one. Naturally, when the Orthodox claimed that activity is the same with essence, and that the Three Persons have one activity, such ἐνέργεια must be internal. Gregory uses the term in the plural when he wants to describe the various operations of God, and in the singular when he speaks of the single activity of the Divine Persons.[650]

---

646 CE I, 435, 1–10 (GNO I, 150, 4–14).

647 CE I, 436, 1–7. πῶς οὖν ὁ τοιαύτην περὶ τοῦ ἐνεργήσαντος λαβὼν τὴν διάνοιαν πρὸς τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ φύσεως ἐναχθήσεται; πῶς ἐκ τοῦ ἀοράτου τὸ ὁρατόν, ἐκ τοῦ ἀφθάρτου τὸ φθορᾷ ὑποκείμενον, ἐκ τοῦ ἀγεννήτως ὄντος τὸ ἀπὸ χρόνου τὴν σύστασιν ἔχον, ἐκ τοῦ εἰσαεὶ διαμένοντος τὸ πρόσκαιρον κεκτημένον τὴν ὕπαρξιν, καὶ ἐκ πάντων τῶν ἐναντίων τὴν περὶ τοῦ ζητουμένου ποιήσεται κατανόησιν; (GNO I, 153, 14–21; tr. Hall, p. 98).

648 CE I, 439–445 (GNO I, 154–156).

649 CE I, 446–447 (GNO I, 156).

650 J.-C. Larchet, *op. cit.*, pp. 188–189.

It seems that Gregory of Nyssa recognizes fully the consequences of the unity of internal activity of God. In another passage from the second book of *Contra Eunomium*, he refutes Eunomius' opinion that only the Father is incorruptible while the Son merely makes himself indestructible. Therefore, in the case of the Son, indestructibility is the outcome of activity, while for the Father, it belongs to him "not on the basis of activity."[651] Gregory briefly answers: "For my part, if true Life acting is an activity, and if to live for ever, and never to suffer destruction, mean the same thing."[652] Life is then the activity which acts of itself (ἡ ὄντως ζωὴ ἑαυτὴν ἐνεργοῦσα), and it must be the same life in the Father and in the Son, since both are not susceptible to destruction and there is no more or less in being destructible and indestructible.[653] As we can see, Gregory has no objection to speak about multiple activities in the substance of God; there is generation as the activity of the Father, but there is also life as the activity of the Trinity. This Life must be understood as absolutely simple with no addition, variation of quantity and quality, or change.[654]

---

651 CE II, 367, 1–2. περὶ τῆς ἀφθαρσίας τοῦ πατρὸς διαλέγεται ὡς οὐκ ἐξ ἐνεργείας προσούσης αὐτῷ (GNO I, 333, 24–25; tr. Hall, p. 141).

652 CE II, 367, 3–6. ἐγὼ δὲ εἰ μὲν ἐνέργειά τίς ἐστιν ἡ ὄντως ζωὴ ἑαυτὴν ἐνεργοῦσα καὶ εἰ ταὐτόν ἐστι τῷ σημαινομένῳ τό τε ἀεὶ ζῆν καὶ τὸ μηδέποτε εἰς φθορὰν διαλύεσθαι οὔπω τῷ λόγῳ προστίθημι, ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἰδίοις ταμιεύσομαι τόποις (GNO I, 333, 26–29; tr. Hall, p. 141).

653 CE II, 370, 4–6. εἰ δὲ ἀνεπίδεκτος φθορᾶς ὡσαύτως ἑκάτερος καὶ οὔτε τὸ μᾶλλον οὔτε τὸ ἧττον ἐν τῇ κατὰ φύσιν ἀφθαρσίᾳ καταλαμβάνεται, πῶς δείκνυσι τοῦ πατρὸς πρὸς τὸν μονογενῆ υἱὸν τὸ ἀσύγκριτον (GNO I, 334, 17–19).

654 CE II, 489, 4–14. εἰ οὖν καὶ αὐτὸς μία ζωὴ εἰλικρινὴς πάσης συνθέσεως καὶ διπλόης κεχωρισμένη καὶ οὐδὲν ὑπόκειται πρᾶγμα παρὰ τὴν τοῦ υἱοῦ ζωήν (πῶς γὰρ <ἂν> ἐν τῷ ἁπλῷ μίξις ἀλλοτρίου πράγματος ὑποπτεύοιτο; οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἔτι ἁπλοῦν εἴη τὸ μεθ' ἑτέρου νοούμενον), ἁπλῆ δὲ ζωὴ καὶ ἡ τοῦ πατρὸς οὐσία, ἁπλῆς δὲ ζωῆς κατ' αὐτὸν τόν τε τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τὸν τῆς ἁπλότητος λόγον οὐδεμία τίς ἐστι διαφορά, οὔτε ἐπιτάσεως οὔτε ὑφέσεως οὔτε τῆς κατὰ τὸ ποσὸν ἢ ποιὸν ἑτερότητος τὴν παραλλαγὴν ἐμποιούσης, ἀνάγκη πᾶσα τὰ ταῖς αὐταῖς ἐννοίαις συμβαίνοντα καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν αὐτῶν προσηγοριῶν ὀνομάζεσθαι (GNO I, 369, 5–15). "If then he too is one absolute Life devoid of all composition and reduplication, and there is no underlying reality beside the life of the Son (for how could any admixture of alien reality be suspected in what is simple? what is perceived as so associated would no longer be simple), and if the being of the Father is also a simple life, and according to the principle of life and simplicity there is no diversity in the simple life, no addition, no subtraction, no variation of

Probably the best example of the unity of activity is the discussion on the will of the Father and the Son. As we have seen Eunomius was consistent in arguing that the Son was generated by the sole act of the will of the Father, and this act was most befitting God. The activity of the will was treated as something in between the two persons and the main basis to discern them. But for Gregory, the activity of the will serves best to explain the unity of the substance of the Father and the Son:

> "We are taught that the Only-begotten is begotten; nothing is unbegotten except the Father. Therefore of necessity the word of truth compels us to hold that there is nothing between the Father and the Son. But where no separation is conceived, close conjunction is surely acknowledged; and what is totally conjoined is not mediated by voice and speech. By 'conjoined' I mean that which is totally inseparable; for the word 'conjunction' does not imply a kind of bodily affinity in what is essentially intelligent, but the union and commingling of wills (διὰ τῆς ταὐτότητος τῶν θελημάτων ἕνωσίν) between one intelligent being and another."[655]

To show the unity of will, Gregory uses the example of a mirror, in which the image only reflects the original object but does not move or bend on its own. Similarly, the will of the Son reflects in every aspect the activity of the will of the Father.[656] But what is even more important is that in the following passages, he provides the arguments that show how inaccurate was Eunomius' position on the activity of will which produces external effects. In this part of *Contra Eunomium*, he begins his long exposition of how to understand the act of creation, which is in fact his own explanation of the quotation from the Scripture which Eunomius used to support his

---

quantity or quality generating change, it must follow that those things which coincide in the same thoughts should also be named with the same appellations" (tr. Hall, p. 169).

655 CE I, 214, 1–12. νεωτέρα γὰρ ἡ κτίσις τοῦ λόγου. γεννητὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἐδιδάχθημεν, ἀγέννητον πλὴν τοῦ πατρός ἐστιν οὐδέν. οὐκοῦν ἐξ ἀνάγκης τὸ μηδὲν εἶναι μέσον τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ νοεῖν ὁ τῆς ἀληθείας λόγος συναναγκάζει. ὅπου δὲ διάστασις οὐκ ἐπινοεῖται, τὸ συνημμένον πάντως ὁμολογεῖται, τὸ δὲ διὰ πάντων συνημμένον φωνῇ καὶ λόγῳ οὐ μεσιτεύεται. συνημμένον δὲ λέγω τὸ ἐν πᾶσιν ἀχώριστον. οὐ γὰρ σωματικήν τινα συμφυΐαν ἐπὶ τῆς νοερᾶς φύσεως τὸ ὄνομα τῆς συναφείας ἐνδείκνυται, ἀλλὰ τὴν τοῦ νοητοῦ πρὸς τὸ νοητὸν διὰ τῆς ταὐτότητος τῶν θελημάτων ἕνωσίν τε καὶ ἀνάκρασιν (GNO I, 287, 22–288, 3; tr. Hall, p. 105).

656 CE II, 215, 3–12 (GNO I, 333, 6–17).

view. He wants to support his theory of names by making a reference to the beginning of the Book of Genesis (1: 1–16) "where God is declared to have said something" and to Psalm (18/19: 2–3) where: "The heavens tell God's glory, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork; day to day brings forth word, and night proclaims knowledge to night." But explaining the second passage, Gregory says that the heavens and all creations indeed tell the glory of God, but:

> "This is not articulate speech, but through the visible things it imparts to our minds the knowledge of the divine power more than if speech proclaimed it in sound. The heaven, then, tells a tale but does not speak, and the firmament announces God's creation without the need of a voice, the day puts forth a word and there is no speech…"[657]

Creation then can give us the knowledge about the power of God (τὴν γνῶσιν τῆς θείας δυνάμεως), about his wisdom, and the beauty of His design, which for the human mind is more than speech in the literal sense. But much more interesting is what Gregory wants to say about God who creates by telling the words of creation. We cannot understand it in a human way, because in God the verb "say" does not mean speech but is rather an intellectual notion.[658] There is also no time sequence and passage from potency to act:

> "It is not like other beings whose nature includes the power to act, where one observes both the potential and the accomplished action. We say for instance that the one who is skilled in the science of shipbuilding is potentially a shipbuilder, but he is effective only when he displays his science in practice. It is not however like that with the blessed Life: rather, in that Life what is thought is in its entirety action and performance, the will passing instantly to its intended goal."[659]

---

657 CE II, 225, 1–5 ταῦτα λόγος μὲν ἔναρθρος οὐκ ἔστιν, ἐντίθησι δὲ διὰ τῶν φαινομένων ταῖς ψυχαῖς τὴν γνῶσιν τῆς θείας δυνάμεως μᾶλλον ἢ εἰ διὰ φωνῆς ὁ λόγος ἐκήρυσσεν. ὥσπερ τοίνυν διηγεῖται ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ οὐ φθέγγεται, καὶ ἀναγγέλλει τὸ στερέωμα τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ ποίησιν καὶ φωνῆς οὐ προσδέεται. καὶ ῥῆμα προΐεται ἡ ἡμέρα καὶ λαλιὰ οὐκ ἔστιν (GNO I, 291, 9–14; tr. Hall, p. 108).

658 CE II, 227, 2–5 (GNO I, 292, 3–8).

659 CE II, 230, 1–9. οὐ γὰρ ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων, οἷς τις πρακτικὴ δύναμις ἐκ φύσεως ἔνεστι, τὸ μὲν δυνάμει θεωρεῖται τὸ δὲ κατὰ τὴν τῆς ἐνεργείας ἐκπλήρωσιν, ὡς φέρε εἰπεῖν ἀεὶ μὲν εἶναι ναυπηγόν φαμεν τῇ δυνάμει τὸν τὴν ναυπηγικὴν ἔχοντα τέχνην, ἐνεργεῖν δὲ τότε, ὅταν ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων δείξῃ τὴν ἐπιστήμην, οὐχ οὕτως καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς μακαρίας ζωῆς. ἀλλ' ὅλον ὅτιπέρ ἐστιν ἐν ἐκείνῃ νοούμενον ἐνέργεια καὶ

So, there is no difference in God, his activity is always in the entirety as his Life is his Will, and producing external effects does not cause any sequence and intermediate entity between Him and His effect. Therefore, neither any internal nor external activity does involve any diversity in God. It is worth mentioning here that in the third book, Gregory also discusses the divine will, and he also points out that we cannot comprehend the divine will in a human way. Therefore, the Father could not have changed his mind and decided that he wanted to generate the Son, since his will always stay the same:

> "God however, being a single Good with his single and uncompounded nature, | looks perpetually to the same goal and never changes in response to impulses of choice (τῆς προαιρέσεως); rather, he always both wills what he is and, of course, is what he wills, so that in both ways he is properly and truly called Son of God: both because his nature has goodness in itself, and because his purpose has never fallen short of the best, so that he might be given this designation by some metaphorical usage."[660]

The activity of will is always coeternal with the substance of God, and, therefore, the Son cannot become a Son, but must always be. We cannot say that God becomes who He is, but rather "wills what He is and, of course, is what He wills" (βούλεται ὅπερ ἐστὶν καὶ ἐστὶ πάντως ὃ καὶ βούλεται), and this definition of will resembles the one which we have seen in Plotinus, who also understood the activity of will this way, as identical with the essence of the self-establishing One.[661] We can also notice that Gregory's understanding of the internal and external activity of will resembles Plotinus' theory of double activity; however, we must remember that in his view, the productive activity of the One was performed as the activity of the intellect not the will.

πρᾶξίς ἐστιν, ἀμέσως τοῦ βουλήματος πρὸς τὸ κατὰ πρόθεσιν τέλος μεθισταμένου (GNO I, 292, 1–9; tr. Hall, p. 109).

660 CE III, 1, 125, 1–9. ὁ δὲ θεὸς ἓν ὢν ἀγαθὸν ἐν ἁπλῇ τε καὶ ἀσυνθέτῳ τῇ φύσει πάντοτε πρὸς τὸ αὐτὸ βλέπει καὶ οὐδέποτε ταῖς τῆς προαιρέσεως ὁρμαῖς μεταβάλλεται, ἀλλ' ἀεὶ καὶ βούλεται ὅπερ ἐστὶν καὶ ἐστὶ πάντως ὃ καὶ βούλεται, ὥστε δι' ἀμφοτέρων υἱὸς θεοῦ κυρίως καὶ ἀληθῶς ὀνομάζεσθαι, τῆς τε φύσεως ἐν ἑαυτῇ τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐχούσης τῆς τε προαιρέσεως οὐκ ἀπερρωγυίας τοῦ κρείττονος, ὡς μὴ ἂν ἐκ καταχρήσεως αὐτῷ τὴν φωνὴν ταύτην ἐπικληθῆναι (GNO II, 45, 27–46, 7; tr. Hall, p. 67).

661 *Enn.* VI, 8, 13, 5–11. (Henry/Schwyzer, vol. 3, pp. 256–257); VI, 8, 13, 50–59 (vol. 3, p. 349).

Therefore, it seems that in Gregory, we observe a Christian modification of this theory. In the following paragraph, we will see yet another modification of this kind, but to summarize this part, we must conclude that by his discussion with Eunomius, Gregory constructed the conceptual framework which became the basis of his claims on incomprehensibility of God.[662]

4.6.4 Activities and incomprehensibility of God

The distinction between internal and external activities is so important because Gregory rightly observes that while the activities which are present in creations are comprehensible, the single activity of the Divine Persons stays beyond the abilities of human intellect since it is the same with the Divine substance.[663] In *Contra Eunomium*, one of the most interesting places where incomprehensibility of the internal activity of God can be seen is the fragment where Gregory defines eternity:

> "The eternity of the divine life, if one were to apply some definition to it, is something like this. It is apprehended as always in being (ἀεὶ μὲν ἐν τῷ εἶναι) but does not allow the thought that it ever was not or will not be."[664]

The concept of understanding eternity as life which is present in its entirety is a reference to Plotinus, who also defined eternity in the same way as endless life.[665] But Gregory does not simply quote Plotinus. In the *Enneads*,

---

662 There is also another very important topic in Gregory's thought related to the problem of understanding activity. Gregory re-established the understanding of the power of God, and the triad substance, power, and activity also demonstrated the unity of the power and substance of God. This aspect, however, is well shown by: M.R. Barnes, *cf. op. cit.*, pp. 260–307.

663 *Cf.* J.-C. Larchet, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

664 CE I, 666, 1–4. Τὸ ἀΐδιον τῆς θείας ζωῆς, ὡς ἄν τις ὅρῳ τινὶ περιλαβὼν ὑπογράψειε, τοιοῦτόν ἐστιν. ἀεὶ μὲν ἐν τῷ εἶναι καταλαμβάνεται, τοῦ δὲ ποτὲ μὴ εἶναι καὶ ποτὲ μὴ ἔσεσθαι τὸν λόγον οὐκ ἐπιδέχεται (GNO 1, 217, 26–29; tr. Hall, p. 217).

665 *Enn.* III, 7, 5, 25–28. Καὶ εἴ τις οὕτω τὸν αἰῶνα λέγοι ζωὴν ἄπειρον ἤδη τῷ πᾶσαν εἶναι καὶ μηδὲν ἀναλίσκειν αὐτῆς τῷ μὴ παρεληλυθέναι μηδ' αὖ μέλλειν -ἤδη γὰρ οὐκ ἂν εἴη πᾶσα- ἐγγὺς ἂν εἴη τοῦ ὁρίζεσθαι (Henry/Schwyzer, vol. 1, p. 343). "and if someone were in their way to speak of eternity as a life which is here and now endless because it is total and expends nothing of itself, since it has not past or future…he would be near to defining it" (McKenna/Page, p. 121). D.L. Balás analyses Gregory's understanding of eternity in *Contra Eunomium* and his dependence on Plotinus in: *Eternity and Time in Gregory of Nyssa's*

eternity is identified with second hypostasis – Intellect (νοῦς) and, therefore, just like Intellect, it can be understood.[666] Gregory of Nyssa, however, defines eternity as the life of God Himself, and therefore it is completely beyond comprehension. He uses the example of a circle which has no beginning. If we extend our intellect from the present, as from the centre of the circle towards the infinity of the divine life:

> "…we may well be drawn round in the same sort of circle by what is impossible to apprehend (ὑπὸ τῆς ἀκαταληψίας), as we perceive that the divine life is continuous and unbroken in every direction and can appreciate that there is no limit anywhere."[667]

Gregory then transforms the thought of Plotinus, and because eternity is the attribute of God, it cannot be comprehended, just as the activity of the life of God is beyond our capability of understanding. Therefore, one can only say that God's eternity means the fullness of His life which is without priority or posterity, but this does not mean that anyone can understand what this life is in itself. Life which is the same with the substance of God must then be seen as incomprehensible.

As we have seen above, Gregory also insisted that even if we can know the activity, this knowledge cannot give us the understanding of the essence of the one who acts. By the example of the smith who makes the gimlet, Gregory argued that making external product does not involve the full potential of the maker, and therefore also activity is not an actualization of full potency of essence,[668] so we cannot conceive the essence from activity even in case of man. In another place, he explains that it is infinitely less possible to understand the substance of God if we start reasoning from His external activities.

In *Contra Eunomium II*, Gregory recalls Eunomius' claims that the word "Unbegotten" measures the infinite nature with a single title while not being

---

Contra Eunomium, in: *Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie*, ed. H. Dörie, M. Altenburger, U. Schramm, Leiden 1976, pp. 128–155.

666 *Cf.* A. Smith, *Eternity and Time*, *op. cit.*, pp. 198–203.

667 CE I 668, 7–10. …καὶ ὁμοίως ὑπὸ τῆς ἀκαταληψίας ἐν κύκλῳ περιελκόμεθα, συνεχῆ καὶ ἀδιάστατον αὐτὴν πρὸς ἑαυτὴν τὴν θείαν ζωὴν ἁπανταχόθεν καταλαμβάνοντες καὶ οὐδὲν πέρας κατ' οὐδὲν μέρος ἐπιγνῶναι δυνάμενοι (GNO I, 218, 14–17; tr. Hall, pp. 131–132).

668 CE I, 424, 11–425, 3 (GNO I, 150, 14–18).

said conceptually, but at the same time, expressing the nature of God.[669] Referring to Basil, he clarifies how to understand the positive and negative names of God:

> "Our position therefore – I am adopting my master's teaching – is that we have a faint and slight apprehension of the divine Nature through reasoning, but we still gather knowledge enough for our slight capacity through the words which are reverently used of it. We claim that the meaning of all these names is not uniform, but some denote things that appertain to God, others those that are absent."[670]

After this opening, Gregory presents various names which are positively ascribing something to God (eternity, justice, goodness, etc.) and negatively saying on what God is not (indestructible, unbegun, immortal etc.). Some of those names are opposites; they indicate what does or what does not apply to God, but their meaning is the same (such as God is good and God has no evil).[671] Therefore, when we say that God is Unbegotten, we say nothing more that He is the Beginning of all things, but we express it in a different form, and, therefore, there is nothing special in the name "Unbegotten", which for Eunomius was the most suitable one to express the nature of God.[672] Gregory concludes that there is no use in multiplying words, since we say nothing new, and because it is only reverence to the sounds without turning attention to their meanings. Referring to the teaching of Basil, Gregory states that the proper reasoning is:

> "…to perceive quite clearly that the manner of existence of the essential nature of the Divinity is intangible, inconceivable, and beyond all rational comprehension. Human thought, investigating and searching by such reasoning as is possible, reaches out and touches the unapproachable and sublime Nature, neither seeing

669 CE II, 125,1–129, 3 (GNO I, 262, 16–263, 20).

670 CE II, 130, 1–131, 3. Οὐκοῦν εἴρηται παρ' ἡμῶν (οἰκειοῦμαι γὰρ τοῦ διδασκάλου τὸν λόγον) ὅτι τῆς θείας φύσεως ἀμυδρὰν μὲν καὶ βραχυτάτην ἔχομεν διὰ τῶν λογισμῶν τὴν ἀντίληψιν, ἀποχρῶσαν δ' ὅμως τῇ βραχύτητι τῆς δυνάμεως ἡμῶν διὰ τῶν ὀνομάτων τῶν περὶ αὐτὴν λεγομένων εὐσεβῶς τὴν γνῶσιν ἐρανιζόμεθα. τούτων δέ φαμεν τῶν ὀνομάτων οὐ μονοειδῆ πάντων εἶναι τὴν σημασίαν, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν τῶν προσόντων τῷ θεῷ (GNO I, 263, 21–28; tr. S.G Hall, p. 87).

671 CE II, 134, 1–4 (GNO I, 264, 18–23).

672 CE II, 135, 1–136, 10 (GNO I, 264, 24–265, 10).

so clearly as distinctly to glimpse the Invisible, nor so totally debarred from approaching as to be unable to form any impression of what it seeks."[673]

The best way to obtain any knowledge of God is to start with a negative conviction that the Divine nature is beyond our capability of understanding it. Such an approach can give man some kind of a "touch of sublime Nature," and Gregory explains it further by saying that we can only know that the nature of God is incomprehensible:

"By the reach of reason its goal is to discover what that is which it seeks, and in a sense it does understand it by the very fact that it cannot perceive it, inasmuch as it acquires clear knowledge that what it seeks is beyond all knowledge."[674]

This kind of "touch" of the incomprehensible Divine nature can make reason truly convinced of what is compatible or incompatible with it, and, therefore, reason can devise true names, but it can never perceive what this nature is in itself. By the very conception of those compatible and incompatible things, reason can know that "that which rests beyond every evil, and is perceived as possessing every good, must surely be such as is unutterable in word and inaccessible to thought."[675] The final conviction which awaits man on his way to God is the "apprehension that he exists" (νοουμένων ὅτι ἔστι).[676]

All those explanations do not tell us what exactly we name when we apply names to God. Negative terms simply indicate what does not apply

673 CE II, 138, 2–11. δι' ἧς ἔνεστι τοὺς μὴ κεκαλυμμένους τῷ αἱρετικῷ προκαλύμματι σαφῶς διϊδεῖν ὅτι τὸ θεῖον, ὅπως ἂν κατὰ τὴν φύσιν ἔχῃ, ἀνέπαφόν τέ ἐστι καὶ ἀκατανόητον καὶ πάσης ἀντιλήψεως τῆς ἐκ τῶν λογισμῶν ὑψηλότερον, ἡ δὲ ἀνθρωπίνη διάνοια πολυπραγμονοῦσα καὶ διερευνωμένη δι' ὧν ἂν ᾖ δυνατὸν λογισμῶν ἐπορέγεται καὶ θιγγάνει τῆς ἀπροσπελάστου καὶ ὑψηλῆς φύσεως, οὔτε τοσοῦτον ὀξυωποῦσα ὡς ἐναργῶς ἰδεῖν τὸ ἀόρατον οὔτε καθάπαξ ἀπεσχοινισμένη τῆς προσεγγίσεως ὡς μηδεμίαν δύνασθαι τοῦ ζητουμένου λαβεῖν εἰκασίαν (GNO I, 265, 24–266, 2; tr. Hall, p. 89).

674 CE II, 139, 1–4. ἀλλὰ τὸ μέν τι τοῦ ζητουμένου διὰ τῆς τῶν λογισμῶν ἐπαφῆς ἐστοχάσατο, τὸ δὲ αὐτῷ τῷ μὴ δύνασθαι κατιδεῖν τρόπον τινὰ κατενόησεν, οἷόν τινα γνῶσιν ἐναργῆ τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν γνῶσιν τὸ ζητούμενον εἶναι ποιησαμένη (GNO I, 266, 3–6; tr. Hall, p. 89).

675 CE II, 140, 6–9. ὅτι τὸ παντὸς μὲν κακοῦ πόρρωθεν ἱδρυμένον, ἐν παντὶ δὲ νοούμενον ἀγαθῷ πάντως τι τοιοῦτόν ἐστιν οἷον λόγῳ τε ἄρρητον εἶναι καὶ λογισμοῖς ἀνεπίβατον (GNO I, 266, 11–14; tr. Hall, p. 89).

676 CE II, 141, 9 (GNO I, 266, 22).

to Him, so they name rather an absence of an attribute and "the statement does not by the words provide information about what is spoken of. What it is not, we learn from the sounds; what it is, the meaning of the words used does not show."[677] Gregory provides a catalogue of negative statements and says that they are true, but they do not tell us what it is (τί δέ ἐστιν) that we speak of. However, this is not only the problem of speaking of God, but it is the very nature of negative statements that does not allow us to identify of what we speak. Similarly, if we multiply negative statements with respect to man (not inanimate, not insensible, not winged, not four-footed, and not aquatic), it would neither describe what man is. Therefore:

> "On exactly the same principle, though many such things are said of the divine Nature, by which we learn what we must understand God to be; but what in itself it essentially is, the words do not teach us."[678]

Due to the weakness of our reason, we are inclined to multiply words to discern the nature of God from what it is not, and that it is also the reason why the "unbegottenness" cannot be counted as one and true name. The very multiplication of negative statements tells us that we still do not have a proper name which denotes the substance. Therefore, although they are true, negative statements cannot name anything in God.

Since negative names can tell us only what God is not without pointing at any real thing, what about positive names? They also cannot name the substance of God, but rather His activities:

> "…what is named by those who speak of him is not what he actually is, for the nature of him who is ineffable; but he gets his titles from the actions he is believed to perform for our lives. So in this particular case, the word just used: 'God', we say, thinking as we give him the title of one who supervises, observes, and with his vision penetrates hidden things."[679]

---

677 CE II, 143, 3–5. οὐ μήν τι περὶ οὗ λέγεται διὰ τῶν ὀνομάτων ὁ λόγος παρίστησιν. τί μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἔστι, δι' ὧν ἠκούσαμεν ἐδιδάχθημεν, τί δέ ἐστιν, ἡ τῶν εἰρημένων οὐκ ἐνεδείξατο δύναμις (GNO I, 267, 6–9).

678 CE II, 144, 6–9. κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον πολλῶν τοιούτων περὶ τὴν θείαν φύσιν λεγομένων, ἐν οἷς χρὴ τὸν θεὸν ὑπονοεῖν εἶναι μανθάνομεν, αὐτὸ δὲ ὅ τι ποτέ ἐστι κατ' οὐσίαν διὰ τῶν εἰρημένων οὐ διδασκόμεθα (GNO I, 267, 14–17).

679 CE II, 149, 1–7. ὀνομάζεται δὲ παρὰ τῶν ἐπικαλουμένων οὐκ αὐτὸ ὅ ἐστιν (ἄφραστος γὰρ ἡ φύσις τοῦ ὄντος), ἀλλ' ἐξ ὧν ἐνεργεῖν τι περὶ τὴν ζωὴν ἡμῶν πεπίστευται τὰς ἐπωνυμίας ἔχει, οἷον καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦτο τὸ ἐκ τοῦ προχείρου

Even the name "God," which is the most common one, is presented as describing the activity of vision or seeing, and, as it is explained in another place, using this name we: "have learnt some partial activity of the divine Nature, we have not by this word come to hold in mind the divine Substance itself."[680]

In the passage presented above, one thing is noticeable. For Gregory of Nyssa, positive names which refer to activities can be recognized primarily by what God does in human life. That is why the activities are so important, because they are the testimony of God who is constantly present on the way of man to Him. This is no longer a theoretical problem of how can we demonstrate the existence or power of God from creation, but rather the explanation of His effective presence in spiritual life of every man. And Gregory strongly claims that these names are applied not to the concepts but to real things. He explains:

> "If we cannot first explain what is being said about God before we think it, and if we think it by means of what we learn from his actions, and if before the act there exists the potency, and the potency depends on the divine will, and the will resides in the authority of the divine Nature – does that not make it clear to us that it is a matter of applying to the realities the terms we use to indicate what happens, and the words are a kind of shadow of the realities, matching the movements of things which exist?"[681]

The chain of things leads from the name of activity to the divine Nature, through the activity itself, the power of God, and His will. Therefore, naming

---

λεγόμενον· θεὸν γὰρ αὐτὸν λέγοντες τὸν ἔφορον καὶ ἐπόπτην καὶ διορατικὸν τῶν κεκρυμμένων νοοῦντες ἐπικαλούμεθα (GNO I, 268, 25–269, 2).

680 CE II, 586, 4–6. ὥστε καὶ διὰ τούτου μερικήν τινα τῆς θείας φύσεως ἐνέργειαν διδαχθέντες τῆς οὐσίας αὐτῆς ἐν περινοίᾳ διὰ τῆς φωνῆς ταύτης οὐκ ἐγενόμεθα· (GNO I, 397, 19–21; tr. Hall, pp. 191–192). In those fragments, Gregory uses the false etymology of name God (θεός) that it comes from the word vision (θεάομαι).

681 CE II, 150, 5–13. εἰ γὰρ μὴ πρότερον ἑρμηνεύομέν τι τῶν περὶ θεοῦ λεγομένων, πρὶν ἂν νοήσωμεν, νοοῦμεν δὲ δι' ὧν ἐκ τῶν ἐνεργειῶν διδασκόμεθα, προϋφέστηκε δὲ τῆς ἐνεργείας ἡ δύναμις, ἡ δὲ δύναμις ἐξήρτηται τοῦ θείου βουλήματος, τὸ δὲ βούλημα ἐν τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ τῆς θείας ἀπόκειται φύσεως, ἆρ' οὐ σαφῶς διδασκόμεθα ὅτι ἐπιγίνονται τοῖς πράγμασιν αἱ σημαντικαὶ τῶν γινομένων προσηγορίαι καὶ ὥσπερ σκιαὶ τῶν πραγμάτων εἰσὶν αἱ φωναί, πρὸς τὰς κινήσεις τῶν ὑφεστώτων σχηματιζόμεναι; (GNO I, 269, 6–14).

an activity, we can only name what we have understood of the real activity of God, while His substance remains unknown.

Since *Contra Eunomium* was probably one of the earliest works of Gregory of Nyssa, it seems plausible that during the polemic with the Anomean, he constructed a solid conceptual basis for his negative theology. The statement that we can know only the activities of God, not His substance, is the crucial one, because thanks to it Gregory could demonstrate not only the fact of incomprehensibility of the essence of God, but also that our names which we use are the names of real things – His activities, and, therefore, Gregory will rely on this distinction throughout his whole theological career.[682] We can also notice that by his exposition of the nature of negative names, Gregory of Nyssa proposes probably the strongest formulation of negative theology. He realizes that when we say that God is infinite, incorruptible, unbegotten, etc., our claim is true, but for him, negative statements do not name any reality present in God Himself. Since positive names refer only to activities, and negative ones refer to nothing that we can conceive, our language and comprehension can never reach God in His substance.

682 A full catalogue of passages in which he uses the distinction between energies and substance to demonstrate the incomprehensibility of God was made by J.-C. Larchet, *op. cit.*, pp. 199–203.

5. The Development of Negative Theology in the Latter Half of the 4th Century

The reaction to Eunomius' claims on comprehensibility of the substance of God goes much deeper than the responses of Basil and Gregory. Moreover, in the latter half of the 4th century, we can observe not only the reaction to Eunomius,[683] but also a deeper penetration of the field of negative theology that would influence Christian theology for good, even when the risk of the Neo-Arian heresy disappeared. The main authors, apart from Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, who are the most obvious participants in the polemic with Eunomius, are Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom. Their writings were to a large extent provoked by the Eunomians' teaching and are analysed here in this context. But before we turn to those two important figures, we must first discuss certain aspects of the negative theology of Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa which have not been mentioned in the preceding chapters but seem important in order to fully expose the extent of negative theology in their writings.

5.1 Basil of Caesarea's incomprehensibility of οὐσία

The first remark that should be made at the beginning, which is absolutely clear in the context of the anti-Eunomian polemic, is the fact that for all the participants in the discussion, God is without doubt the οὐσία, and they never seriously considered that God could exceed the categories of existence.[684] We should always keep it in mind as the multiplicity of Neoplatonic similarities,[685] especially pointed out in various studies may obscure this obvious truth. It is perfectly obvious for Basil that the substance of God is incomprehensible for creatures. We can find many places where Basil

683 *Cf*. V. Losski, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Cambridge 1973, p. 21.

684 It is still not very clear how does Basil understand οὐσία in *Contra Eunomium*, and in my opinion, further studies should be conducted. *Cf*. David G. Robertson, *Stoic and Aristotelian Notions of Substance in Basil of Caesarea*, VCh, vol. 52, no. 4 (Nov. 1998), pp. 393–417.

685 *Cf*. B. Sesbüé, *Introduction*, in: *Contre Eunome*, SC 299, p. 9.

admits the same idea in quite similar words both in *Contra Eunomium* and *Homilies in Hexaemeron*, so he is consistent at the very beginning as well as the end of his writing activity. The two following passages are a very good example of this claim:

> "I think that comprehension of God's substance transcends not only human beings, but also every rational nature. Now by 'rational nature' here, I mean one which belongs to creation."[686]

> "It is to be expected that the very substance of God is incomprehensible to everyone except the Only-Begotten and the Holy Spirit."[687]

But, as a matter of fact, in his argumentation, Basil goes even further and claims that we have no knowledge not only about the substance of God but about the substance of the created world as well.[688] Although we recognize creatures and we are encouraged by Basil to contemplate them and even admire them and their Creator, the accidents cannot provide us any knowledge about the essence:

> "In the same way we shall counsel ourselves with regard to the essence of earth [the context is an exegesis of Gen 1,1]. We will not meddle about its essence proper (ἥτις ποτέ ἐστι), nor waste our thoughts searching for the substrate itself (αὐτὸ τὸ ὑποκείμενον), nor try to find some nature devoid of qualities, existing in such a way on its own account. For we are well aware that whatever is seen around it (περὶ αὐτήν) has been rendered fully by the account of being as completive of the essence (συμπληρωτικά τῆς οὐσίας). You arrive at nothing [therefore] if you try to take away by reason each of the qualities it possesses. If you take away black,

686 *Con. Eun.* I, 14, 1–3. Οἶμαι δὲ οὐκ ἀνθρώπους μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πᾶσαν λογικὴν φύσιν ὑπερβαίνειν αὐτῆς τὴν κατάληψιν. Λογικὴν δὲ νῦν τὴν ἐν τῇ κτίσει λέγω (SC 299, p. 220; tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, p. 112).

687 *Con. Eun.* I, 14, 14–17. Πᾶν γάρ που τὸ ἐναντίον, εἰκὸς αὐτὴν μὲν τὴν οὐσίαν ἀπερίοπτον εἶναι παντὶ, πλὴν εἰ τῷ Μονογενεῖ καὶ τῷ ἁγίῳ Πνεύματι· ἐκ δὲ τῶν ἐνεργειῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀναγομένους ἡμᾶς (SC 299, p. 220; tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, p. 113).

688 *Con. Eun.* III, 6, 5–10. Νῦν δὲ μυρία οὐ τῶν ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι αἰῶνι ἀποκειμένων ἡμῖν μόνον, οὔτε τῶν νῦν ὄντων ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς ἀποκέκρυπται, ἀλλ' οὔτε τῶν ὑπαρχόντων ἡμῖν ἐν τῷ σώματι τρανὴ καὶ ἀναντίῤῥητός ἐστιν ἡ κατάληψις (SC 305, p. 166). "But the truth of the matter is that there are countless things of which we do not have clear and incontrovertible knowledge – not only those things reserved for us in the age to come and those now hidden in the heavens, but also those things that belong to our bodily existence" (tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, pp. 192–193).

cold, depth, density, the qualities associated with taste a substance possesses, or any other that may be seen around it, the substrate will be nothing."[689]

The impossibility of knowing any substance at all, not only God's substance, is Aristotle's thesis formulated in book VII of *Metaphysics*.[690] Aristotle presents the process of abstractions which in the end gives us no knowledge about the *ousia* and states that "it is beyond us to say what else [it] is."[691]

The attention that Basil pays to utter incomprehensibility of the essence is of course a reaction to Eunomius' concept of rationality which was expressed as cognoscibility of God's essence.[692] In order to explain that the lack of knowledge about the very substance is not equivalent to complete ignorance, in his later writings, Basil says that although we know ourselves, even our own substance is out of our reach. We also do not have any knowledge of our own essence, but we still know ourselves:

---

689 *In Hex*. I, 8 (SC 26, p. 120; tr. Schaff, p. 230).

690 *Cf. Met.* VII, 3, 1029 a, 9–26. "The statement itself is obscure, and further, on this view, *matter* becomes substance. For if this is not substance, it is beyond us to say what else is. When all else is taken away evi-dently nothing but matter remains. For of the other elements some are affections, products, and capacities of bodies, while length, breadth, and depth are quantities and not substances. For a quantity is not a substance; but the substance is rather that to which these belong primarily. But when length and breadth and depth are taken away we see nothing left except that which is bounded by these, whatever it be; so that to those who consider the question thus matter alone must seem to be substance. By matter I mean that which in itself is neither a particular thing nor of a certain quantity nor assigned to any other of the categories by which being is determined. For there is something of which each of these is predicated, so that its being is different from that of each of the predicates; for the predicates other than substance are predicated of substance, while substance is predicated of matter. Therefore the ultimate substratum is of itself neither a particular thing nor of a particular quantity nor otherwise positively characterized; nor yet negatively, for negations also will belong to it only by accident" (tr. Barnes).

691 *Met.* 1029 a, 10–11. εἰ γὰρ μὴ αὕτη οὐσία, τίς ἐστιν ἄλλη διαφεύγει· (tr. Barnes).

692 *Cf. Con. Eun.* II, 22, 39–43. ἀλλ' ἀπὸ μὲν τῶν ταπεινῶν καὶ σαρκικῶν νοημάτων ἐν τοῖς περὶ Θεοῦ δόγμασι καθαρεύειν, γέννησιν δὲ τῇ ἁγιωσύνῃ καὶ τῇ ἀποθείᾳ τοῦ Θεοῦ πρέπουσαν ἐννοεῖν· (SC 305, pp. 90–92). "He knows that when it is a question of doctrines about God he should purify words of lowly and fleshly concepts and think of the begetting that is suitable for the holiness and impassibility of God" (tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, p. 164).

“For thus and in this sense I both know and am ignorant even of myself. For I know myself, who I am, but I do not know myself, insofar as I am ignorant of my substance.”[693]

Basil introduces here a paradox that will be in fact crucial for the theological knowledge. One may know and not know at the same time: καὶ οἶδα καὶ ἀγνοῶ.[694] In order to correct the Eunomian mistakes, Basil uses negative theology, but he avoids the error of agnosticism, sees the risks of this method, and distances himself from this method when limited only to the *alpha privativum* technique. Basil employed alpha privatives to say what God is not, i.e., ἄρρητος - unspoken, ἀιδής - unseen, ἀθάνατος - immortal, ἀπαθής - not suffering and so on, but he remarks that even privative forms used in the descriptions give us knowledge about what God is not[695] and what kind of attributes cannot be connected with Him.

Simultaneously, Basil uses natural theology based on contemplation of nature[696] and positive theology based on the Bible.

“Again, we say that God is ‘good’, ‘Just’, ‘Creator’, ‘Judge’, and all such things. So, then, as in the case of the terms we just spoke about which signified a denial and rejection of what is foreign to God, so here they indicate the affirmation and

693 *Ep*. 235, 2. ᾿Επεὶ καὶ ἐμαυτὸν οὕτω τούτῳ τῷ λόγῳ καὶ οἶδα καὶ ἀγνοῶ. Οἶδα μὲν γὰρ ἐμαυτὸν ὅστις εἰμί, οὐκ οἶδα δὲ καθὸ τὴν οὐσίαν μου ἀγνοῶ (Courtonne, vol. 3, pp. 45–46; tr. LCL 243, p. 381).

694 *Cf. Ep*. 235, 2 (Courtonne, vol. 3, pp. 45–46).

695 *Cf. Con. Eun*. I, 9, 34–41. ῾Ως τοίνυν τὸ ἄφθαρτον τὸ μὴ προσεῖναι τῷ Θεῷ φθορὰν σημαίνει· καὶ τὸ ἀόρατον τὸ ὑπερβαίνειν αὐτὸν πᾶσαν τὴν διὰ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν κατάληψιν· καὶ τὸ ἀσώματον τὸ μὴ ὑπάρχειν αὐτοῦ τριχῆ διαστατὴν τὴν οὐσίαν· καὶ τὸ ἀθάνατον τὸ μηδέποτε διάλυσιν αὐτῷ προσγενήσεσθαι· οὕτω φαμὲν καὶ τὸ, ἀγέννητον, δηλοῦν τὸ γέννησιν αὐτῷ μὴ προσεῖναι. Εἰ μὲν οὖν μηδὲν τούτων στερητικὸν τῶν ὀνομάτων, οὐδὲ ἐκεῖνο (SC 299, pp. 90–92). “Just as ‘incorruptible’ signifies that no corruption is present to God, and ‘invisible’ that he is beyond every comprehension through the eyes, and ‘incorporeal’ that his substance is not three-dimensional, and ‘immortal’ that dissolution will never happen to him, so too do we also say that ‘unbegotten’ indicates that no begetting is present to him. So, then, if none of the former terms is privative, then neither is the latter” (tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, pp. 103–104).

696 *Cf. In Hex*. I, 8 (SC 26, p. 118).

existence of what has affinity with God and is appropriately considered in connection with him."[697]

But what exactly can we know about God? This problem is developed by Basil later on, and most probably, it was related to the discussion and attacks of the Eunomians who accused Basil of ignorance.[698] We can know God's attributes[699] that are common to the divine essence. Because we can recognize God from His activities in the created world, we know Him as the Creator of the world and the source of all beings. It is God's will to let us gain the knowledge about Him.[700] In this process, Christians refer to a

697 *Con. Eun.* I, 10, 28–33, Πάλιν, ἀγαθὸν λέγομεν τὸν Θεὸν, καὶ δίκαιον, καὶ δημιουργὸν, καὶ κριτὴν, καὶ ἄλλα ὅσα τοιαῦτα. Ὡς οὖν ἐπ' ἐκείνων ἀθέτησίν τινα καὶ ἀπαγόρευσιν τῶν ἀλλοτρίων τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐσήμαινον αἱ φωναὶ, οὕτως ἐνταῦθα θέσιν καὶ ὕπαρξιν τῶν οἰκείων τῷ Θεῷ καὶ πρεπόντως περὶ αὐτὸν θεωρουμένων ἀποσημαίνουσιν (SC 299, p. 206; tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, pp. 105–106).

698 *Cf. Ep.* 234, 2: Therefore, we know that the saying is of mockers: "If you are ignorant of the substance of God, you worship what you do not know" (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 43; tr. LCL 243, p. 375).

699 *Cf. Ep.* 234, 1. Καὶ γὰρ τὴν μεγαλειότητα τοῦ Θεοῦ εἰδέναι λέγομεν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν καὶ τὴν σοφίαν καὶ τὴν ἀγαθότητα καὶ τὴν πρόνοιαν ᾗ ἐπιμελεῖται ἡμῶν καὶ τὸ δίκαιον αὐτοῦ τῆς κρίσεως, οὐκ αὐτὴν τὴν οὐσίαν. Ὥστε ἐπηρεαστικὴ ἡ ἐρώτησις. Οὐ γὰρ ὁ τὴν οὐσίαν μὴ φάσκων εἰδέναι ὡμολόγησε τὸν Θεὸν μὴ ἐπίστασθαι, ἐκ πολλῶν ὧν ἀπηριθμησάμεθα συναγομένης ἡμῖν τῆς περὶ Θεοῦ ἐννοίας (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 42). "For instance, we say that we know the greatness of God, and His power, and His wisdom, and His goodness, and His providence, whereby He cares for us, and the justice of His judgment, not His very substance. Therefore the question is captious. Fore he who says that he does not know the substance has not confessed that he does not know God, since the concept of God is gathered by us form the many attributes which we enumerated" (tr. LCL 243, pp. 371–273).

700 *Cf. Con. Eun.* I, 14, 14–20. Πᾶν γάρ που τὸ ἐναντίον, εἰκὸς αὐτὴν μὲν τὴν οὐσίαν ἀπερίοπτον εἶναι παντὶ, πλὴν εἰ τῷ Μονογενεῖ καὶ τῷ ἁγίῳ Πνεύματι· ἐκ δὲ τῶν ἐνεργειῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀναγομένους ἡμᾶς, καὶ διὰ τῶν ποιημάτων τὸν ποιητὴν ἐννοοῦντας, τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ καὶ τῆς σοφίας λαμβάνειν τὴν σύνεσιν. Τοῦτο γάρ ἐστι τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὃ πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ὁ Θεὸς ἐφανέρωσεν (SC 299, pp. 220–222). "It is to be expected that the very substance of God is incomprehensible to everyone except the Only-Begotten and the Holy Spirit. But we are led up from the activities of God and gain knowledge of the Maker through what he has made, and so come in this way to an understanding of his goodness and wisdom. For what can be known about God is that which

very unique starting point on the way of cognition of the image of God in man.[701] We do not search God as an abstract idea; we search God who reveals Himself in created beings. The divine names reveal His energies which descend towards the created world, yet they do not lead man closer to His inaccessible essence.

Negative theology in Basil's thought is inseparably connected with the positive and eminent way. His theology is not so mystical as Gregory's, but it is radically opposite to the rationalism of Eunomius.[702] Basil reminds his readers that the aim of Christian life is not knowledge but salvation. The very first step along this way is epistemological humility.

> "But I do know that He exists, but what His substance is I consider beyond understanding. How then am I saved? Through faith. And it is faith enough to know that God is, not what He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. Knowledge of His divine substance, then, is the perception of His incomprehensibility; and that is to be worshipped which is comprehended, not as to what its substance is, but as to that its substance exists."[703]

If we give up the illusory desire to possess the knowledge of God's essence and concentrate on natural theology, which will lead us to the knowledge of God's existence, the next obvious step provoked by our admiration of the divine activities in the world will be faith and worship.[704] Knowledge,

---

God has manifested [Rom 1.19] to all human beings" (tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, p. 113).

701 *Cf.* Aghiorgoussis, *Image as Sign (Sēmeion) of God*, GOThR, 21 (1976), p. 21.

702 *Cf.* B. Sesboüé, *Introduction* in Basil de Césarée, *Contre Eunome*, SC 299, p. 92.

703 *Ep*. 234, 2: Ἐγὼ δὼ ὅτι μὲν ἔστιν οἶδα, τί δὲ ἡ οὐσία ὑπὲρ διάνοιαν τίθεμαι. Πῶς οὖν σώζομαι; Διὰ τῆς πίστεως. Πίστις δὲ αὐτάρκης εἰδέναι ὅτι ἐστὶν ὁ Θεός, οὐχὶ τί ἐστι, καὶ τοῖς ἐκζητοῦσιν αὐτόν μισθαποδότης γίνεται. Εἴδησις ἄρα τῆς θείας οὐσίας ἡ αἴσθησις αὐτοῦ τῆς ἀκαταληψίας, καὶ σεπτὸν οὐ τὸ καταληφθὲν τίς ἡ οὐσία, ἀλλ' ὅτι ἐστὶν ἡ οὐσία (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 43; tr. LCL 243, p. 375).

704 *Cf. Ep*. 235, 1. "Εν δὲ τῇ περὶ Θεοῦ πίστει ἡγεῖται μὲν ἡ ἔννοια ἡ περὶ τοῦ ὅτι ἐστὶ Θεός, ταύτην δὲ ἐκ τῶν δημιουργημάτων συνάγομεν. Σοφὸν γὰρ καὶ δυνατὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ πάντα αὐτοῦ τὰ ἀόρατα ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου κτίσεως νοοῦντες ἐπιγινώσκομεν. Οὕτω δὴ καὶ Δεσπότην ἑαυτῶν αὐτὸν καταδεχόμεθα. Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ παντὸς μὲν τοῦ κόσμου δημιουργὸς ὁ Θεός, μέρος δὲ κόσμου ἡμεῖς, καὶ ἡμῶν ἄρα δημιουργὸς ὁ Θεός. Ταύτῃ τῇ γνώσει ἡ πίστις ἀκολουθεῖ καὶ τοιαύτῃ πίστει ἡ προσκύνησις" (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 44). "But in faith in God, the notion of

faith, and worship constitute for Basil three stages of the relationship with God. In this perspective, the discovery of existence of God the Maker is the very first step[705] to recognize His goodness and wisdom, to discover God who reveals His actions in the Holy Bible and the created world. The culmination and final aim of this path is to worship God.

But the relationship between faith and knowledge seems to be more complex in Basil's case. In Letter 234, those terms seem to be mixed:

> "So worship follows faith, and faith is confirmed by power. But if you say that the believer also knows, he knows from what he believes; and vice versa he believes from what he knows. We know God from His power. We, therefore, believe in Him who is known, and we worship Him who is believed in."[706]

In this and other texts, Basil seems to treat knowledge and faith interchangeably as two terms referring to cognition. Georgios Martzelos recalls one more text and another type of the relationship between εἴδησις and πίστις. In *Homilia in illud Attende tibi ipsi*, faith precedes the knowledge of God. As the knowledge of God cannot be achieved by means of sensual organs,

---

the existence of God precedes, and this notion we gather from His works. For it is by perceiving His wisdom and power and goodness and all His invisible qualities as shown in the creation of the universe, that we come to a recognition of Him. Thus we also accept Him as our Lord. For since God is maker of the whole universe, and we are a part of the universe, God is therefore our maker also. And faith follows this knowledge, and worship follows such faith" (tr. LCL 243, p. 379).

705 *Cf. Con. Eun.* I, 14, 42–46. Πιστεῦσαι γὰρ δεῖ πρῶτον, ὅτι ἔστι Θεὸς, καὶ τοῖς ἐκζητοῦσιν αὐτὸν μισθαποδότης γίνεται. Οὐ γὰρ ἡ τοῦ τί ἐστιν ἐξερεύνησις, ἀλλ' ἡ τοῦ ὅτι ἔστιν ὁμολογία τὴν σωτηρίαν ἡμῖν παρασκευάζει (SC 299, pp. 222–224). "*One must first believe that God exists and that he rewards those who seek him* [Heb 11.6]. For it is not the investigation of what he is, but rather the confession that he is, which prepares salvation for us." (tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, p. 113).

706 *Ep.* 234, 3. Οὕτως ἡ μὲν προσκύνησις τῇ πίστει ἀκολουθεῖ, ἡ δὲ πίστις ἀπὸ δυνάμεως βεβαιοῦται. Εἰ δὲ λέγεις τὸν πιστεύοντα καὶ γινώσκειν, ἀφ' ὧν πιστεύει ἀπὸ τούτων καὶ γινώσκει· ἢ καὶ ἀνάπαλιν ἀφ' ὧν γινώσκει ἀπὸ τούτων καὶ πιστεύει. Γινώσκομεν δὲ ἐκ τῆς δυνάμεως τὸν Θεόν. Ὥστε πιστεύομεν μὲν τῷ γνωσθέντι, προσκυνοῦμεν δὲ τῷ πιστευθέντι (Courtonne, vol. 3, pp. 43–44; tr. LCL 234, p. 377).

but by means of intellect, which is equipped through faith.[707] We can see that despite the complex relationship[708] of those two realities (εἴδησις and πίστις), both should be treated as mutually complementary tools on the way to knowing God. Basil's theology leads us to other than rational cognition of God. Only in worship do faith and knowledge find their aim and their deeper meaning and significance.[709] At the very end of *Contra Eunomium* when speaking about the nature of the Holy Spirit, Basil gives us the perspective of cognition that is reserved for Christians whom he encourages:

> "to be convinced that experience and exact comprehension of him is reserved for us in the subsequent age, when, passing beyond the vision of the truth that comes *dimly in a mirror,* we will be deemed worthy of contemplating *face to face* [1 Cor 13:12]."[710]

---

707 *Cf*. G. Martzelos, The Significance of the Distinction between the Essence and Energies of God according to St. Basil the Great, p. 155; Basil, *Homilia in illud Attende tibi ipsi*. Ἀσώματον ἐννόει τὸν θεὸν ἐκ τῆς ἐνυπαρχούσης σοι ψυχῆς ἀσωμάτου, μὴ περιγραφόμενον τόπῳ· ἐπειδὴ οὐδὲ ὁ σὸς νοῦς προηγουμένην ἔχει τὴν ἐν τόπῳ διατριβήν, ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς πρὸς τὸ σῶμα συναφείας ἐν τόπῳ γίνεται. Ἀόρατον τὸν θεὸν εἶναι πίστευε, τὴν σεαυτοῦ ψυχὴν ἐννοήσας, ἐπεὶ καὶ αὐτὴ σωματικοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἄληπτός ἐστιν. Οὔτε γὰρ κέχρωσται, οὔτε ἐσχημάτισται, οὔτε τινὶ χαρακτῆρι σωματικῷ περιείληπται, ἀλλ' ἐκ τῶν ἐνεργειῶν γνωρίζεται μόνον. Ὥστε μήτε ἐπὶ θεοῦ ζητήσῃς τὴν δι' ὀφθαλμῶν κατανόησιν, ἀλλὰ τῇ διανοίᾳ ἐπιτρέψας τὴν πίστιν, νοητὴν ἔχε περὶ αὐτοῦ τὴν κατάληψιν (PG 31, 216 A).

708 *Cf*. also *Con. Eun*. I, 7, 19–23. καὶ ὡς τῇ λαμπρότητι τῆς γνώσεως τοὺς κεκαθαρμένους τὸ ὄμμα τῆς ψυχῆς καταυγάζων· ἄμπελον δὲ, ὡς τοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ κατὰ τὴν πίστιν ἐῤῥιζωμένους ἐπ' ἔργων ἀγαθῶν καρποφορίαις ἐκτρέφων· (SC 299, pp. 222–224). "He also calls himself this because he illuminates those who have purified the eye of their soul with the splendor of his knowledge. He calls himself 'vine' because he nurtures those who have been planted in him by faith so that they may bear the fruits of good works" (tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, p. 99).

709 *Cf*. G. Martzelos, *op. cit*., p. 156; *Cf*. Basil *Ep*. 234 and 235 (Courtonne, vol. 3, pp. 41–47).

710 *Con. Eun*. 3,7, 38–40. Εὐσεβοῦς γάρ ἐστι διανοίας τὰ ἀποσιωπηθέντα ἐν ταῖς ἁγίαις Γραφαῖς εὐλαβεῖσθαι ἐπιφημίζειν τῷ ἁγίῳ Πνεύματι, πεπεῖσθαι δὲ τὴν ἐμπειρίαν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκριβῆ κατάληψιν εἰς τὸν ὕστερον ἡμῖν ἀποκεῖσθαι αἰῶνα, ὅταν, διαβάντες τὸ δι' ἐσόπτρου καὶ αἰνίγματος ὁρᾶντὴν ἀλήθειαν, τῆς πρὸς πρόσωπον θεωρίας ἀξιωθῶμεν (SC 305, p. 174; tr. DelCogliano/Radde-Gallwitz, p. 196).

5.2 Negative theology and mystical experience in Gregory of Nyssa

In *Contra Eunomium*, Gregory of Nyssa refers to Basil as his teacher on the incomprehensibility of God.[711] So, if it is not only a rhetorical figure, he thinks of himself as the continuator of his brother's theology also in the field of negative theology, and, therefore, Basil's thought seems to be one of the factors which pushed Gregory to develop further negative speaking of God. But before we look more closely at the negative theology of Gregory of Nyssa, especially in its mystical dimension, it is worth making some remarks on negative language in general.

It must be pointed out that although Gregory constantly underlines the ineffability of God's essence, he never denies the possibility of speaking about God.[712] We have observed in the preceding chapter that he makes an effort to secure the position that names which we multiply indeed say something about God, and our naming Him is not pointless. A good example of this is his discussion of the descriptive character of the lack of properties. Although Gregory of Nyssa strongly criticizes Eunomius as regards the positive meaning of the name "Unbegotten," he very often uses negation (στέρησις) to define some properties or even entities. Among those, we find darkness, ignorance, and evil. C. Stead argues that Gregory is not systematic, and, therefore, many problems arise with respect to his use of negation. Most of all, he does not express how negation is related to other categorical terms.[713] It can be seen when Gregory considers the problem of what knowledge and ignorance are (ἡ γνῶσις καὶ ἡ ἄγνοια). This is important for him since he constantly repeats that living in God is the life of the soul, and this life is to know God. On the contrary, the lack of knowing God is the alienation from Him and evil. A very significant example of this is a fragment of *On Infants' Early Deaths*.[714] Knowledge and ignorance can

---

711 *Cf.* CE II, 138, 1–11 (GNO I, 265, 24–266, 2).

712 *Cf.* G. Maspero, *Trinity and Man*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

713 *Cf.* C. Stead, *Ontologie und Terimniologie bei Gregor von Nyssa*, in: *Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie*, ed. H. Dörie, M. Altenburger, U. Schramm, Leiden 1976, p. 114.

714 *Inf.* (GNO III/2, 80, 25–81, 22).

be both counted as relations (τὸ πρός τί), and, therefore, they cannot be understood as substances, but they also cannot be seen as equal:

> "If, then, knowledge is not a substance, but a perfected operation of the soul, it must be conceded that ignorance must be much farther removed still from anything in the way of substance; but that which is not in that way does not exist at all; and so it would be useless to trouble ourselves about where it comes from."[715]

Although ignorance must somehow exist in the subject because it is a relation, Gregory is not sure how to describe its ontological status. It must exist, but it has no existence (ὕπαρξις) of its own, since it is the "negation of the operation of knowing." (γνῶσιν ἐνεργείας ἀναίρεσις).[716] Therefore, in the case of the soul, a negative attribute refers to some kind of reality, whereas in the case of God, it merely states the absence or inconvenience of something which is denied of Him in a negative statement.[717]

This fragment is significant because, although Gregory does not use the term στέρησις, it shows the same problems which we have seen in Aetius and Eunomius who wanted to convince their opponents that "unbegotten" is not a negative predicate. But we can certainly see here an attempt to define the ontological status of a feature which can be characterized in a negative way, and this discussion very much resembles Aristotle's statements on blindness as the negation of the operation of seeing.[718] The case of ignorance is then a good example of how Gregory treats philosophical sources. Although he often expresses his disapproval of philosophy, especially in the

715 *Inf.* (GNO III/2, 80, 16–20). εἰ οὖν ἡ γνῶσις οὐσία οὐκ ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ περί τι τῆς διανοίας ἐνέργεια, πολὺ μᾶλλον ἡ ἄγνοια πόρρω τοῦ κατ' οὐσίαν εἶναι ὡμολόγηται. τὸ δὲ μὴ κατ' οὐσίαν ὂν οὐδὲ ἔστιν ὅλως. μάταιον τοίνυν ἂν εἴη περὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος τὸ ὅθεν ἐστὶ περιεργάζεσθαι (tr. NPNF II, vol. 5, p. 36).

716 *Inf.* (GNO III/2, 80, 23–24).

717 *Cf.* CE II, 143, 3–5. οὐ μήν τι περὶ οὗ λέγεται διὰ τῶν ὀνομάτων ὁ λόγος παρίστησιν. τί μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἔστι, δι' ὧν ἠκούσαμεν ἐδιδάχθημεν, τί δέ ἐστιν, ἡ τῶν εἰρημένων οὐκ ἐνεδείξατο δύναμις (GNO I, 267, 6–9).

718 *Top.* I, 106b, 13–20. Aristotle discusses in this passage the contradictory opposites saying that the lack of seeing could have two meanings. If somebody does not possess the power of seeing, it is the privation of the power, but in case of having this power, it is simply the privation of the activity (ἐνεργέια) of seeing.

context of the discussion with Eunomius, he does not refrain from using philosophy when it serves his theological purposes.[719]

The passage presented above contains yet another characteristic feature of Gregory's negative theology. It is almost always presented in the context of having a life in God or even more often as part of a mystical doctrine. Although the discussion with Eunomius would seem to direct the issue to purely doctrinal and theoretical considerations, incomprehensibility of God is the fundament for understanding the path to man's unity with God. As we saw above, even considering the name "God," Gregory talks about it as describing the activities which He performs in the human soul. This is significant because in the majority of his works, the passages on the ineffability of God constitute a starting point to the discussion of His activities.[720] So the problem of the incomprehensible substance of God and the personal dimension of the work of His activities are intrinsically linked.

When characterizing the mystical doctrine of Gregory of Nyssa, A. Louth points out that the most important feature of his teaching is a radical division between the Creator and creations. This gap is so deep that it leads Gregory to the denial of the possibility of ecstasy.[721] I would argue that not only the radical doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* was the cause of such claims, but also the teaching of the role of the Divine activities devised during the discussion with Eunomius led Gregory to such conviction.

Usually the path to God is divided into three stages,[722] and at each of these stages, we can find elements of negative theology, because the most important aspect of each is to remove false conceptions of God. Gregory describes it his commentary on the *Song of Songs*, when he talks about the

719 *Cf.* C. Stead, *Ontologie und Terimniologie bei Gregor von Nyssa*, *op. cit.*, p. 107. He also notes that on one hand Gregory's philosophical conceptions are original and forceful, but on the other, they "are confused by his habit of citing received philosophical opinions at second hand, without criticizing the term in which they are framed" (p. 117).

720 Cf. G. Maspero, *Trinity and Man*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

721 *Cf.* A. Louth, *The Origins…*, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

722 Gregory follows Origen in describing the spiritual growth by the corresponding books of the Holy Scripture: infancy with Proverbs, youth with Ecclesiastes, and maturity with the Song of Songs. But those three stages can be also characterized as light, cloud, and darkness, *cf.* A. Louth, *op. cit.* pp. 80–81.

ascent of Moses. The first transition which must take place is from darkness to light: "…the first withdrawal from false and erroneous notions about God takes the form of a transition from darkness to light."[723] But in this context, what is called darkness means the false notions which we can obtain from the sensual world. From this point, the vision of the soul and its knowledge only becomes more and more accustomed to darkness:

"More attentive apprehension of hidden realities, which leads the soul to the invisible realm by way of what appears, is like a cloud that casts a shadow on everything that appears but yet induces and accustoms the soul to look upon what is hidden. But the soul that has made its way through these stages to higher things, having left behind whatever is accessible to human nature, enters within the innermost shrine of the knowledge of God and is entirely seized about by the divine darkness; and in this darkness, since everything that appears and is comprehended has been left outside, only the invisible and the incomprehensible remain for the soul's contemplation – and in them God is, just as the Word says concerning the Lawgiver: 'Moses entered into the darkness where God was' (Exod 20:21)."[724]

Getting closer to the mystery of God means leaving behind everything that is "accessible to human nature." Therefore, we can say that the knowledge which man has of God from His activities must be abandoned at this stage. In a similar passage from *The life of Moses*, Gregory explains that the ascent of Moses teaches us that the soul must leave behind not only what the senses observe, but also the notions of intellect:

723 *In Cant.* XI ἡ πρώτη ἀπὸ τῶν ψευδῶν καὶ πεπλανημένων περὶ θεοῦ ὑπολήψεων ἀναχώρησις ἡ ἀπὸ τοῦ σκότους εἰς φῶς ἐστι μετάστασις (text and tr. Norris, pp. 340, 1–2).

724 *In Cant.* XI, ἡ δὲ προσεχεστέρα τῶν κρυπτῶν κατανόησις ἡ διὰ τῶν φαινομένων χειραγωγοῦσα τὴν ψυχὴν πρὸς τὴν ἀόρατον φύσιν οἷόν τις νεφέλη γίνεται τὸ φαινόμενον μὲν ἅπαν ἐπισκιάζουσα πρὸς δὲ τὸ κρύφιον | βλέπειν τὴν ψυχὴν χειραγωγοῦσα καὶ συνεθίζουσα, ἡ δὲ διὰ τούτων ὁδεύουσα πρὸς τὰ ἄνω ψυχή, ὅσον ἐφικτόν ἐστι τῇ ἀνθρωπίνῃ φύσει καταλιποῦσα, ἐντὸς τῶν ἀδύτων τῆς θεογνωσίας γίνεται τῷ θείῳ γνόφῳ πανταχόθεν διαληφθεῖσα, ἐν ᾧ τοῦ φαινομένου τε καὶ καταλαμβανομένου παντὸς ἔξω καταλειφθέντος μόνον ὑπολείπεται τῇ θεωρίᾳ τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ ἀόρατόν τε καὶ ἀκατάληπτον, ἐν ᾧ ἐστιν ὁ θεός, καθώς φησι περὶ τοῦ νομοθέτου ὁ λόγος ὅτι Εἰσῆλθε δὲ Μωϋσῆς εἰς τὸν γνόφον οὗ ἦν ὁ θεός (Norris, pp. 340, 2–12).

> "For leaving behind everything that is observed, not only what sense comprehends but also what the intelligence thinks it sees, it keeps on penetrating deeper until by the intelligence's yearning for understanding it gains access to the invisible and the incomprehensible, and there it sees God. This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness."[725]

Since even an intellectual notion must be rejected then, there is no concept which can truly refer to God. Also contemplation is for Gregory only a necessary stage of knowledge, which corresponds to the way of the cloud, whereas the ultimate knowledge is the "non-seeing."[726] Therefore, this doctrine differs not only from Plato, but also from Origen and Evagrius.[727] But it is worth asking whether one can find any answer in Gregory on how to understand this kind of knowledge above knowledge or seeing without seeing. We can find a very interesting attempt to explain this kind of seeing God in the *Homilies on Beatitudes*. At the beginning, Gregory notices the profound problem of the ambiguity which can be found in the Holy Scripture. The sixth beatitude promises seeing God to those of the pure heart (Mt 5:8), but simultaneously, there are passages which deny such a possibility. Gregory quotes the Gospel of John (1:18), the first letter to Timothy (6:16) and once again returns to the figure of Moses.[728] This contradiction goes even further because when Moses says that no one can see God and stay alive (Ex 22:20): "Nevertheless life eternal is to see God, and this is ruled impossible by the pillars of the faith, John and Paul and Moses."[729] Gregory then once again points out the intrinsic relationship of having the

---

725 *De Vita Moysis* II, 163, 1–8. Καταλιπὼν γὰρ πᾶν τὸ φαινόμενον, οὐ μόνον ὅσα καταλαμβάνει ἡ αἴσθησις, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅσα ἡ διάνοια δοκεῖ βλέπειν, ἀεὶ πρὸς τὸ ἐνδότερον ἵεται, ἕως ἂν διαδύῃ τῇ πολυπραγμοσύνῃ τῆς διανοίας πρὸς τὸ ἀθέατόν τε καὶ ἀκατάληπτον κἀκεῖ τὸν Θεὸν ἴδῃ. Ἐν τούτῳ γὰρ ἡ ἀληθής ἐστιν εἴδησις τοῦ ζητουμένου καὶ ἐν τούτῳ τὸ ἰδεῖν ἐν τῷ μὴ ἰδεῖν, ὅτι ὑπέρκειται πάσης εἰδήσεως τὸ ζητούμενον, οἷόν τινι γνόφῳ τῇ ἀκαταληψίᾳ πανταχόθεν διειλημμένον (SC 1, pp. 210–212; tr. Malherbe/Ferguson, p. 94).

726 Cf. N. Russell, *The doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, Oxford 2004, p. 231.

727 *Cf.* A. Louth, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

728 *De Beat.* VI, 1 (GNO, VII/2, 137, 13–20).

729 *De Beat.* VI, 1 (GNO, VII/2, 137, 23–24; tr. Hall, p. 66).

knowledge of God and participating in His life. Therefore, seeing God is necessary not only because man is constantly longing to see Him, but also because otherwise there is no possibility for the soul to have the unending life and to possess God since in the biblical meaning "to see" means "to possess."[730] Since Moses and Paul deny the possibility to see God:

> "then it would appear that what is proposed by the Word in the present Beatitude is an impossibility. What good is it to us to know how God is seen, if the possibility of it is not also given to our understanding."[731]

Therefore, the Lord demands something which is beyond our nature, and to answer this dilemma, Gregory first turns to his doctrine of divine activities. While: "what the divine nature might be in and of itself transcends all conceptual comprehension, being inaccessible and unapproachable to speculative thoughts,"[732] there are other means to see and comprehend this nature.[733] We can somehow see the artificer through the beauty of his works, but this is rather the apprehension of the skill and craftsmanship of the Maker, not his very nature. Therefore: "He who is by nature invisible becomes visible in his operations (ἐνεργείαις), being seen in certain cases by the properties he possesses."[734]

Although the problem seems to be resolved, Gregory does not stop here because he realizes that the beatitude promises the real seeing of God, not only His activities, so there must be something more that was promised in the beatitude, because "the Lord does not say that knowing something about God is blessed, but to possess God in oneself."[735] But what does it mean to possess God? For Gregory, this means that if the heart of a man

---

730 *De Beat.* VI, 2 (GNO, VII/2, 137, 10–14).

731 *De Beat.* VI, 2. ἀδύνατον ἔοικέ τι εἶναι τὸ τῷ μακαρισμῷ νῦν ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου προκείμενον. τί οὖν ἡμῖν τὸ κέρδος ἐκ τοῦ γνῶναι πῶς ὁ θεὸς ὁρᾶται, εἰ τὸ δυνατὸν τῇ ἐπινοίᾳ μὴ πρόσεστιν (GNO, VII/2, 139, 3–6; tr. Hall, p. 67).

732 *De Beat.* VI, 3 Ἡ θεία φύσις αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτὴν ὅ τι ποτὲ κατ' οὐσίαν ἐστὶ, πάσης ὑπέρκειται καταληπτικῆς ἐπινοίας, ἀπρόσιτος καὶ ἀπροσπέλαστος οὖσα ταῖς στοχαστικαῖς ἐπινοίαις (GNO, VII/2, 140, 15–17; tr. Hall, p. 68).

733 *De Beat.* VI, 3 (GNO, VII/2, 141, 1–3).

734 *De Beat.* VI, 3 Ὁ γὰρ τῇ φύσει ἀόρατος, ὁρατὸς ταῖς ἐνεργείαις γίνεται, ἔν τισι τοῖς περὶ αὐτὸν καθορώμενος (GNO, VII/2, 141, 25–27; tr. Hall, p. 69).

735 *De Beat.* VI, 4. ὅτι οὐ τὸ γνῶναί τι περὶ θεοῦ μακάριον ὁ κύριος εἶναί φησιν· ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐν ἑαυτῷ σχεῖν τὸν θεόν (GNO, VII/2, 137, 13–15; tr. Hall, pp. 69–70).

is pure, the soul can hold the image of God and can see God in this image. Thus, the Word in his blessing seems to comfort the soul longing for God by saying:

> "You men who have some longing for the vision of what is really good, when you hear that the divine majesty is exalted above the heavens, its glory inexplicable, its beauty ineffable, its nature inaccessible, do not fall into despair of being able to see what you desire. The measure of what is accessible to you is in you, for thus your Maker from the start invested your essential nature with such good. God has imprinted upon your constitution replicas of the good things in his own nature, as though stamping wax with the shape of a design."[736]

Despite all negative statements of the impossibility of any comprehension of the substance of God, Gregory seems to find a positive aspect of our knowledge. Although man is constantly longing for God, always desiring to know God, whom he could not know,[737] Gregory seems to admit that seeing God in the image is real, but this is only the participation in God, while His substance in itself remains incomprehensible. As A. Louth points out, this is not an alternate way of seeing God different to seeing in a cloud, but it is rather the positive side of the same experience.[738]

Therefore, we can say that what Gregory's claims about seeing God shows best the unity of his doctrine. We can constantly see his struggle to preserve absolute incomprehensibility of God, whose nature can be known only in His activities, but at the same time, he always wants to convince his readers that such statements do not make God inaccessible to man. Therefore, in his mystical doctrine, he speaks about the real vision of invisible and incomprehensible God present in the soul of man, thanks to his image.

---

736 *De Beat.* VI, 4. Ὦ ἄνθρωποι, ὅσοις ἐστί τις ἐπιθυμία τῆς τοῦ ὄντως ἀγαθοῦ θεωρίας, ἐπειδὰν ἀκούσητε ὑπὲρ τοὺς οὐρανοὺς ἐπῆρθαι τὴν θείαν μεγαλοπρέπειαν, καὶ τὴν δόξαν αὐτῆς ἀνερμήνευτον εἶναι, καὶ τὸ κάλλος ἄφραστον, καὶ τὴν φύσιν ἀχώρητον· μὴ ἐκπίπτετε εἰς ἀνελπιστίαν τοῦ μὴ δύνασθαι κατιδεῖν τὸ ποθούμενον. τὸ γάρ σοι χωρητὸν, τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ κατανοήσεως μέτρον ἐν σοί ἐστιν, οὕτω τοῦ πλάσαντός σε τὸ τοιοῦτον ἀγαθὸν εὐθὺς τῇ φύσει κατουσιώσαντος. τῶν γὰρ τῆς ἰδίας φύσεως ἀγαθῶν ὁ θεὸς ἐνετύπωσε τῇ σῇ κατασκευῇ τὰ μιμήματα, οἷόν τινα κηρὸν σχήματι γλυφῆς προτυπώσας (GNO, VII/2, 142, 24–143, 9; tr. Hall, p. 70).

737 This is the famous doctrine of Gregory which J. Daniélou calls *epektasis*, *cf. Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, Paris 1944, pp. 309–326.

738 *Cf.* A. Louth, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

5.3 Unknown God of Gregory of Nazianzus

The complex teaching about God's cognoscibility can be found in Gregory's orations, among which the most famous are the so-called *Theological Orations*.[739] They are also important for us since they were a response to the Neo-Arian teaching. As we are informed, Eunomians were present in Constantinople and they were a real problem for the community and their bishop.[740] The *Theological Orations* constitute an attempt to deal with theological controversies, including God's cognoscibility. But in order to present complete Gregory's teaching on the human knowledge about God, we should also take in consideration other orations, in particular *Oration 20* (*On Theology, and the Appointment of Bishops*), *Oration 38* (*On the nativity of Christ*), and *Oration 40* (*On Baptism*), as well as *Oration 45* (*On Holy Pascha*).

Gregory confronts Eunomius on several levels, and some of his arguments are directly while others – indirectly addressed to them. We find in Gregory's teaching the same elements as in his predecessors, the statements in common with Basil and Gregory of Nyssa that we know that God exists but we do not know anything about His οὐσία.

> "No man has yet breathed all the air, no mind has yet contained or language embraced God's essence in its fullness"[741]

It is obvious that we cannot comprehend what is the very nature of God if we cannot understand even our own nature and the nature of the created world. Gregory calls for some moderation in the striving at full comprehension. Not to acknowledge the limits of our reason is, he says, "to be

---

739 *Cf. Or*. 27–31 (PG 36, 12–172).

740 *Cf. Or*. 27, 1 (PG 36, 12 A). "There are people, believe me, who not only have 'itching ears;' their tongues, also and now, I see, even their hands itch and attack my arguments" (Wickham/Williams, p. 218) *Or*. 20, 10 (PG 35, 1077 A). "All of this is what our abusers argue; all of this belongs to those who rashly attack everything we say." and "I am constantly repeating the same argument, since I fear for the crude and material style of your thought" (tr. B.E. Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, New York 2006, p. 103).

741 *Or*. 30, 17 (PG 36, 126 C; tr. Wickham/Williams, p. 274).

fetched in an abyss of nonsense with no halting place."[742] Natural theology is limited to a discovery of God's existence from the beauty and order of visible things.[743]

After a long description of various problems that we are not able to resolve, Gregory ascertains that "if you do not fully grasp these things, of which your own sense faculties are witnesses, how do you suppose you can know with accuracy what and how great God is? This is really a lot of foolishness!"[744] Neither our mind nor language can grasp God's οὐσία.[745] For Gregory of Nazianzus, God's essence is unknowable not only to an ordinary man but also to biblical heroes such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Elijah, and Peter.[746] According to F. Norris, the assertion that the divine nature is incomprehensible is the most often repeated one in *Theological Orations*.[747]

Gregory points out that if we do not know visible things, the invisible ones are even more above our range. In Gregory's teaching, we observe the antinomy between what is sensual and spiritual even more clearly than in Basil.[748] It is our bodily existence that makes a contact with God difficult.

---

742 *Or.* 28. 8 (PG, 36, 36 B; tr. Wickham/Williams, p. 228). *Cf.* also C.A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God. In Your Light We Shall See Light*, Oxford 2008, p. 111.

743 *Cf. Or.* 28, 13 (PG 36, 41 C-43 A).

744 *Or.* 20, 11 (PG 35, 1080 A; tr. Daley, p. 104).

745 *Cf. Or.* 30, 17 (PG, 36, 125 B). "Our starting-point must be the fact that the God cannot be named. Not only will deductive arguments prove it, but the wisest Hebrews of antiquity, so far as can be gathered, will too. The ancient Hebrews used special symbols to venerate the divine and did not allow anything inferior to God to be written with the same letters as the word 'God' on the ground that the divine should not be put on even this much of a level with things human" (tr. Wickham/Williams, p. 274). *Or.* 30, 17 (PG, 36, 125 B-C). "No man has yet breathed all the air; no mind has yet contained or language embraced God's essence in its fullness. No, we use facts connected with him to outline qualities which correspond with him, collecting a faint and feeble mental image from various quarters" (tr. Wickham/Williams, p. 274).

746 *Cf. Or*. 28, 17–20 (PG 36, 48 C-53 A).

747 *Cf*. F. Norris, *Introduction* [in:] *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning. The Five Theological Orations of Gregory of Nazianz*. intr. and com. F.W. Norris, tr. L. Wickham, F. Williams, Leiden 1991, p. 40.

748 *Or*. 37, 11 (PG 36, 296 B). Ἡ σὰρξ τῷ κόσμῳ προσέδησεν, ἀλλ' ὁ λογισμὸς πρὸς Θεὸν ἀνήγαγεν· ἡ σὰρξ ἐβάρησεν, ἀλλ' ὁ λογισμὸς ἐπτέρωσεν·ἡ σὰρξ ἔδησεν, ἀλλ' ὁ πόθος ἔλυσεν.

> "That may be the reason this corporeal gloom stands barrier between us and God like the cloud of the time between Hebrews and Egyptians, being, it may be, too, the 'darkness which he made his hiding place, meaning our grossness, through which few but briefly peer.'"[749]

According to J. Pelikan, accepting those limitations of human reason, functioning within them, and not allowing the reach of reason to exceed its grasp is not a sacrifice of the intellect, nor an abdication of the rational philosophical activity.[750] Gregory in various places mentions the reasons of God's incomprehensibility. According to Beeley, for Gregory, the incomprehensibility of God is the necessary result of the infinitude of God's being and the finitude of creaturely existence, including human thought.[751]

> "God is the most beautiful and exalted of the things that exist (τῶν ὄντων) – unless one prefers to think of him as transcending being (ὑπὲρ τὴν οὐσίαν), or to place the sum total of existence (τὸ εἶνα) in him, from whom it also flows to others."[752]

In his discourse of divine incomprehensibility, he compares the greatness and magnitude of God the Creator to a theologian's ability to know him.[753] *Via eminentiae* seems to be a necessary complement of negative and positive ways of speaking about God. Therefore, He not only surpasses all things in magnitude and greatness, but He is the "supreme nature" (φύσις ἀνωτάτω).[754] So God is not only supremely great and beautiful but He is even more supreme to the category of greatness and other categories, as well as time and space.[755] In *Oratio* 28, Gregory preaches that God's nature is not simply "greater" than our ability to understand, or even "above

---

749 *Or.* 28, 12 (PG 36, 41 B). διὰ τοῦτο μέσος ἡμῶν τε καὶ θεοῦ ὁ σωματικὸς οὗτος ἵσταται γνόφος, ὥσπερ ἡ νεφέλη τὸ πάλαι τῶν Αἰγυπτίων καὶ τῶν Ἑβραίων. καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν ἴσως, ὃ ἔθετο σκότος ἀποκρυφὴν αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἡμετέραν παχύτητα, δι' ἣν ὀλίγοι καὶ μικρὸν διακύπτουσιν (tr. Wickham/Williams, pp. 230–231).

750 *Cf.* J. Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism*, London 1993, p. 50.

751 *Cf.* C.A. Beeley, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

752 *Or.* 6, 12 (PG 35, 737 B). ὅτι κάλλιστον μὲν τῶν ὄντων καὶ ὑψηλότατον Θεὸς, εἰ μὴ τῷ φίλον καὶ ὑπὲρ τὴν οὐσίαν ἄγειν αὐτὸν, ἢ ὅλον ἐν αὐτῷ τιθέναι τὸ εἶναι, παρ' οὗ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις (tr. Beeley, *op. cit.* p. 95).

753 *Cf.* C.A. Beeley, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

754 *Cf. Or.* 31, 10 (PG 36, 144 B).

755 *Cf.* C.A. Beeley, *op. cit.* p. 95.

all things" (ὑπὲρ ἅπαντα), in the sense of being superior to them on their own terms, but He is "first and unique" (πρώτης καὶ μόνης) in an absolute sense,[756] and in *Oratio* 25, God's existence is presented as a kind radically different from our own.[757]

In his polemic with Eunomians, Gregory first of all put points that not everybody can be called a theologian and dispute about divine matters.[758] He begins *Theological Orations* with a presentation of his theological method. As an answer to the theories produced by Eunomians,[759] Gregory points to the Orthodox theology and reminds its fundamental conditions.

> "Discussion of theology is not for everyone, I tell you, not for everyone – it is no such inexpensive or effortless pursuit. (…) It is not for all men, but only for those who have been tested and have found a sound footing in study, and more importantly, have undergone, or at the very least are undergoing, purification of body and soul."[760]

The idea that the knowledge of God is closely related to morality was rather absent in the Eunomian doctrine but was constantly present from the beginnings of a philosophical inquiry.[761] Here, not only unknowability of God, which is clearly the essence of the dispute, distinguishes the Orthodox from heretics, but also an inseparable connection between the practice and the possibility of practising theology. Gregory bases the necessity of transformation and detachment from mundane matters directly on Platonic assumptions that the similar clings to the similar. In *Oration* 20, Gregory encourages the faithful:

---

756 *Cf. Or*. 28, 31 (PG 36, 72; tr. Wickham/Williams, p. 244).

757 *Cf. Or* 25, 17 (PG 35, 1224 A).

758 *Cf. Or.* 27, 3 (PG 35, 1224 A).

759 *Cf. Or*. 20, 1. "When I see the endless talkativeness that haunts us today, the instant sages and designated theologians, for whom simply willing to be wise is enough to make them so, I long for the philosophy that comes from above; I yearn for that 'final lodging,' to use Jeremiah's phrase, and I want only to be off by myself" (PG 35, 1065 A-B; tr. Daley, p. 98).

760 *Or.* 27, 3 Οὐ παντός, ὦ οὗτοι, τὸ περὶ θεοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν, οὐ παντός· οὐχ οὕτω τὸ πρᾶγμα εὔωνον καὶ τῶν χαμαὶ ἐρχομένων. προσθήσω δέ, οὐδὲ πάντοτε, οὐδὲ πᾶσιν, οὐδὲ πάντα, ἀλλ' ἔστιν ὅτε, καὶ οἷς, καὶ ἐφ' ὅσον. οὐ πάντων μέν, ὅτι τῶν ἐξητασμένων καὶ διαβεβηκότων ἐν θεωρίᾳ, καὶ πρὸ τούτων καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ σῶμα κεκαθαρμένων (PG 36, 14 D-16 A; tr. Wickham/Williams, p. 218).

761 We can see it already in *Letter* VII of Plato (*Ep*. VII 326 B-C).

> "Approach it by the way you live: what is pure can only be acquired through purification. Do you want to become a theologian someday, to be worthy of the divinity? Keep the commandments, make your way forward through observing the precepts (τὰς ἐντολὰς φύλασσε): for the practical life (πρᾶξις) is the launching-pad for contemplation (θεωρία)."[762]

As Jean Plagnieux observes, it is impossible to separate Gregory's doctrine of God from his doctrine of the means by which God is known.[763] The concept that what is unclean cannot be unified with what is pure is constantly repeated in Gregory's orations:[764]

> "For one who is not pure to lay hold of pure things is dangerous, just as it is for weak eyes to look at the sun's brightness."[765]

> "Therefore, the first requirement is to purify oneself, then to associate oneself with the One who is pure."[766]

As in many other cases, it is a good example how biblical and philosophical influences intermingle in an author's work without the possibility to identify the exact source of direct inspiration. Both in pagan as well as Christian philosophy, there is a common idea of purification which leads to *theosis*.[767] Just to point one though crucial passage of the sixth blessing which was so

---

762 *Or.* 20, 12. Διὰ πολιτείας, ἄνελθε· διὰ καθάρσεως, κτῆσαι τὸ καθαρόν. Βούλει θεολόγος γενέσθαι ποτὲ, καὶ τῆς θεότητος ἄξιος; τὰς ἐντολὰς φύλασσε· διὰ τῶν προσταγμάτων ὅδευσον· πρᾶξις γὰρ ἐπίβασις θεωρίας· ἐκ τοῦ σώματος τῇ ψυχῇ φιλοπόνησον (PG 35, 1080 B; tr. Daley, p. 104).

763 *Cf.* J. Plagnieux, *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze théologien*, Paris 1952, p. 109.

764 *Cf.* Ch. A. Beeley, p. 66. The most important studies of Gregory's doctrine of purification are: H. Pinault, *Le platonisme de Saint Grégoire de Nazianze: Essai sur les relations du christianisme et de l'hellénisme dans son oeuvre théologique*, Paris 1925; J. Plagnieux, *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze théologien*, Paris 1952 and C. *Moreschini*, *Luce e purificazione nella dottrina di Gregorio Nazianzeno*, Augustinianum, vol. 13, no. 3 (Dec. 1973), pp. 535–549; T. Spidlik, *Gregoire de Nazianze. Introduction a I' etude de sa doctrine spirituelle*, Rome 1971.

765 *Or.* 27, 3 (PG 36, 16 A). μὴ καθαρῷ γὰρ ἅπτεσθαι καθαροῦ τυχὸν οὐδὲ ἀσφαλές, ὥσπερ οὐδὲ ὄψει σαθρᾷ ἡλιακῆς ἀκτῖνος (tr. Wickham/Williams, p. 218).

766 *Or.* 20, 4 (PG 35, 1069). Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καθαρτέον ἑαυτὸν πρῶτον, εἶτα τῷ καθαρῷ προσομιλητέον (tr. Daley, p. 100). And nearly exactly in the same words in *Or.* 39, 9 (PG 36, 344 B; tr. Daley, p. 131) and similar *Or.* 2. 39, 71; 17. 12; 18. 3; 30. 20).

767 *Cf.* H. Pinault, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

important for Gregory of Nyssa: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Mt 5.8).[768] We can find similar assumptions in Plato's *Phaedo*: "it cannot be that the impure attain the pure."[769] As Beeley notes, Plato's doctrine of purification became widely influential in later Hellenistic traditions, and Plotinus,[770] whom Gregory with much probability read, strove to popularize the modified Platonic doctrine of purification.[771]

Gregory also describes the means of purification which are first of all mindfulness of God (μεμνῆσθαι θεοῦ), meditation, and worship.[772] After purification comes illumination which precedes a mystical union. Gregory continues the scheme introduced by Origen, who applied this distinction to the three protocanonical books of Wisdom ascribed to Solomon: *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes*, and the *Song of Songs*, where ethics is assigned to Proverbs, physics assigned to Ecclesiastes, and enoptics assigned to the *Song of Songs*.[773] There are three stages that the soul must pass through progressively: first –learning virtue; next – adopting a right attitude to natural things; and then – ascending to the contemplation of God. Illumination is conditioned by purification and proportionate to it.

> "Where there is fear, there is observation of the commandments; where the commandments are observed, there is a cleansing of the flesh, that cloud that blocks the soul's vision and keeps it from seeing clearly the rays of divine illumination; but where there is cleansing, there is also illumination, and illumination is the fulfilment of desire for those eager to share in the greatest things—or in the greatest Thing, or in That which is beyond the great!"[774]

Gregory's primary concept for God's nature is light, and he frequently refers to the knowledge of God as illumination or coming to share in the divine light.[775] The ultimate aim of human existence is participation in God.[776]

---

768 μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν Θεὸν ὄψονται.

769 *Phaedo* 67 B: μὴ καθαρῷ γὰρ καθαροῦ ἐφάπτεσθαι.

770 E.g. Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.2.7: Καὶ γὰρ ἡ νόησις ἐκεῖ ἐπιστήμη καὶ σοφία, τὸ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἡ σωφροσύνη, τὸ δὲ οἰκεῖον ἔργον ἡ οἰκειοπραγία, τὸ δὲ οἷον ἀνδρία ἡ ἀυλότης καὶ τὸ ἐφ' αὑτοῦ μένειν καθαρόν.

771 *Cf.* C.A. Beeley, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

772 *Cf. Or*. 27, 4 (PG 36, 16CD; tr. Wickham/Williams, p. 219).

773 *Cf.* A. Louth, *The Origins…*, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

774 *Or.* 39, 8 (PG 36, 343 A; tr. Deeley, p. 131).

775 More about illumination, see B.E. Deeley, *op. cit.*, pp. 104–108.

776 *Cf. Or* 30, 4 (PG 36, 108 B).

Those who are purified, he says, will come to know that the Trinity as well as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are known by one another.[777]

In *Oration* 21, Gregory gives a very suggestive account of *theosis*. It may be even interpreted as the possible ascent of the soul to God, even in the present life, a type of the soul's ascent to deification, but in other *Orations*, Gregory remarks that this union and knowledge is possible only in future life.[778] We must remember that just like for Gregory of Nyssa, each stage of ascent relies on some kind of negation: negation of impurity, negation of our concepts of the Divine, etc.

Gregory gives his clearest statement on the positive knowledge of God in the Epiphany orations, and in the anti-Eunomian context of *Oration* 28, he naturally emphasizes the incomprehensibility of God showing that in the Orthodox faith, there is place for both knowing and absolute mystery – that there is no space for easy answers and that an apological attitude often leads us to certain simplifications. We can observe that Gregory himself tries to avoid such traps of common patterns of thinking. When commenting on the use of negation in theology, he omits its long philosophical tradition with respect to privation[779] and very clearly explains that although it is not a mistake to define God in the categories of negation when we attribute to Him, such terms as incorporeal, ingenerated, and immutable,[780] it would not help us in any way to define who He is and what His essence is. Negative theology should be accompanied by positive assertions.[781] "A person

777 *Cf. Or.* 25, 17 (PG 35, 1221 C-D). Γενοῦ τι τῶν εἰρημένων πρότερον, ἢ τοιοῦτος, καὶ τότε γνώσῃ τοσοῦτον, ὅσον ὑπ' ἀλλήλων γινώσκεσθαι. Νῦν δὲ δίδασκε τοσοῦτον εἰδέναι μόνον, μονάδα ἐν Τριάδι, καὶ Τριάδα ἐν μονάδι προσκυνουμένην, παράδοξον ἔχουσαν καὶ τὴν διαίρεσιν καὶ τὴν ἕνωσιν (tr. Beeley, p. 102).

778 *Or.* 20, 12 (PG, 35, 1080 C). "Yet I consider this to be nothing else than to share in what is purest and most perfect; and the most perfect of all things that exist is the knowledge of God. Let us, then, hold on to what we have and acquire what we can, as long as we live on earth; and let us store our treasure there in heaven, so that we may possess this reward of our labor: the full illumination of the holy Trinity – what it is, its qualities and its greatness, if I may put it this way – shining in Christ himself, our Lord, to whom be glory and power for the ages of ages. Amen" (tr. Daley, s. 105).

779 *Cf.* R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

780 *Cf. Or.* 28, 9 (PG 36 C-37 A; tr. Wickham/Williams, p. 228).

781 *Cf. Or.* 28, 9 (PG 36, 37 A-B; tr. Wickham/Williams, p. 229).

who tells you what God is not but fails to tell you what He is, is rather like someone, who asked what twice five are, answers “not two, not three, not four, not five…”[782] In his apology of God’s incomprehensibility, Gregory shows the need to use also positive theology against the Eunomian doctrine.

A similar paradox is found when the figure of Moses is being recalled. He is the one who ascends the Mountain to meet God and who has left all of the impurity below. According to Ch. A. Beeley, Gregory is largely responsible for creating the image of Moses as a primary model of Christian growth and the vision of God. This archetype was first used by Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, and Pseudo-Dionysius followed Gregory Nazianzen’s work. The motif itself became standard in Eastern and Western spirituality.[783] The figure of Moses is used here to underline the absurdity of Eunomius’ claim, since even Moses who prayed to comprehend God could only see His averted figure and not His face.[784]

But still according to Gregory, the main aim of human existence is participation in God who is the greatest reward for all efforts. In the life to come, He can draw those who are purified and lightened to Himself and let them know God without any of the limitations of the present state of

782 *Or.* 28, 9 (tr. Wickham/Williams, p. 229).

783 *Cf.* C.A. Beeley, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

784 *Or.* 28, 3. ἐπεὶ δὲ προσέβλεψα, μόλις εἶδον θεοῦ τὰ ὀπίσθια· καὶ τοῦτο τῇ πέτρᾳ σκεπασθείς, τῷ σαρκωθέντι δι’ ἡμᾶς θεῷ Λόγῳ· καὶ μικρὸν διακύψας, οὐ τὴν πρώτην τε καὶ ἀκήρατον φύσιν, καὶ ἑαυτῇ, λέγω δὴ τῇ τριάδι, γινωσκομένην, καὶ ὅση τοῦ πρώτου καταπετάσματος εἴσω μένει καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν χερουβὶμ συγκαλύπτεται, ἀλλ’ ὅση τελευταία καὶ εἰς ἡμᾶς φθάνουσα. ἡ δέ ἐστιν, ὅσα ἐμὲ γινώσκειν, ἡ ἐν τοῖς κτίσμασι καὶ τοῖς ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ προβεβλημένοις καὶ διοικουμένοις μεγαλειότης, ἤ, ὡς ὁ θεῖος Δαβὶδ ὀνομάζει, μεγαλοπρέπεια. ταῦτα γὰρ θεοῦ τὰ ὀπίσθια, ὅσα μετ’ ἐκεῖνον ἐκείνου γνωρίσματα, ὥσπερ αἱ καθ’ ὑδάτων ἡλίου σκιαὶ καὶ εἰκόνες ταῖς σαθραῖς ὄψεσι παραδεικνῦσαι τὸν ἥλιον, ἐπεὶ μὴ αὐτὸν προσβλέπειν οἷόν τε, τῷ ἀκραιφνεῖ τοῦ φωτὸς νικῶντα τὴν αἴσθησιν (PG 36, 36 B-C). “Peering in I saw not the nature as it abides within the first veil and is hidden by the Cherubim, but as it reaches us at its furthest remove from God, being, so far as I can understand, the grandeur, or as divine David calls it the ‘majesty’ inherent in the created things he has brought forth and governs. All these indications of himself which he has left behind him are God’s ‘averted figure’. They are, as it were, shadowy reflections of the Sun in water, reflections which display to eyes too weak” (tr. Wickham/Williams, pp. 225–226).

human existence.[785] But Gregory claims that even in the present state, we may be conducted to the knowledge of God but it is God's not human act. He is sceptic about the possibility of knowing God by our own means,[786] but limitations of human intellect do not separate Christians from God since "faith, in fact, gives fullness to our reasoning."[787]

785 *Cf. Or*. 38, 7 (PG 36, 317 C). "For he contains the whole of being in himself, without beginning or end, like an endless, boundless ocean of reality; he extends beyond all our notions of time and nature, and is sketchily grasped by the mind alone, but only very dimly and in a limited way; he is known not directly but indirectly, as one image is derived from another to form a single representation of the truth: fleeing before it is grasped, escaping before it is fully known, shining on our guiding reason – provided we have been purified – as a swift, fleeting flash of lightning shines in our eyes. And he does this, it seems to me, so that, insofar as it can be comprehended, the Divine might draw us to itself – for what is completely beyond our grasp is also beyond hope, beyond attainment – but that insofar as it is incomprehensible, it might stir up our wonder, and through wonder might be yearned for all the more, and through our yearning might purify us, and in purifying us might make us like God; and when we have become this, that he might then associate with us intimately as friends – my words here are rash and daring! – uniting himself with us, making himself known to us, as God to gods, perhaps to the same extent that he already knows those who are known by him" (tr. Daley, p. 120).

786 *Cf. Or.* 39, 8–10 (PG, 36, 344 D-345 A). "For the same Word is both fearful to those who are unworthy on account of its nature, yet on account of its loving kindness also accessible to those who are converted in the way we have described, who have driven out the unclean, material spirit from their souls, and have swept and adorned their own souls by self-examination and who, besides fleeing from evil, practice virtue and make Christ to dwell within them entirely, or at least as much as possible. [When we have done this] and so enlightened ourselves with the light of knowledge, then let us speak of the wisdom of God that is hidden in a mystery and enlighten others. Meanwhile, let us purify ourselves and be initiated into the Word, so that we may do as much good to ourselves as possible, forming ourselves in God's image and receiving the Word when he comes – not only receiving him, in fact, but holding onto him and revealing him to others." (tr. Daley, in: Beeley, pp. 69–70, with my own alterations).

787 *Or.* 29, 21 (PG 36, 104 A; tr. Wickham/Williams, p. 260).

5.4 John Chrysostom against Eunomius

John Chrysostom wrote twelve homilies against the Anomeans, which can be divided into two series. The first five, which deal with God's incomprehensibility, were preached when he was a priest in Antioch[788] and were addressed both to the Heterodox and the Orthodox. This is the reason why they are not so theologically and philosophically sophisticated as Basil's and Gregory's texts, unlike even Gregory of Nazianzus, whose *Orations* were full of theological and philosophical analyses, John Chrysostom presents a more pastoral attitude. But it does not mean that Chrysostom was not aware of all the nuances of the controversy. On the contrary, we find many proofs that he deliberately simplified his teaching.[789] Additionally, John Chrysostom, as J. Daniélou mentioned in his introduction to the critical edition, quotes not only the thoughts of Gregory and Basil, but includes his own ideas as well.[790] The aim of the homilies is apologetic: "The time I spend on these arguments will both increase your knowledge about the Anomoeans and will make my prize of victory over those heretics a brighter one."[791] We can also observe that to provide better reception, John uses mainly biblical examples.

The general content of the homilies is similar to the predecessors in the polemic: divine essence is incomprehensible[792] not only for human beings but also for angels.[793] John declares it in many places in a beautiful style:

> "Let us call upon him, then, as the ineffable God who is beyond our intelligence, invisible, incomprehensible, who transcends the power of mortal words. Let us call on him as the God who is inscrutable to the angels, unseen by the Seraphim,

788 *Cf.* St. John Chrysostom, *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, tr. P.W. Harkins, Washington 1984, p. 22.

789 *Cf.* Von Ivanka who sees some analogy with the scepticism of the New Academy in the conviction that man can only know the sensible world (*Hom.* II, 209 nn). E. von Ivanka, *Vom Platonismus zur Theorie der Mystik*, Scholastik, 11 (1936), pp. 178–185.

790 *Cf.* J. Daniélou, *Introdution*, in: SC 28bis, p. 25.

791 *Hom.* IV, 8–12 (SC 28bis, p. 228; tr. Harkins, p. 115).

792 *Cf. Hom.* V, 251–257 (SC 28bis, p. 292). "But why do I speak of the essence of the angels when we do not even know well the essence of our own souls? Rather, we do not have any knowledge whatsoever of that essence" (tr. Harkins p. 149).

793 *Cf. Hom.* IV, 302–309 (SC 28bis, p. 252).

> inconceivable to the Cherubim, invisible to the principalities, to the powers, and to the virtues, in fact, to all creatures without qualification, because he is known only by the Son and the Spirit."[794]

Not only divine essence but also divine economy is inaccessible for the people.[795] Man is unable to know even the created word[796] and his own soul, so how can he comprehend angels[797] or the reality that is above him.[798] In his attitude, we can observe the lack of the trust in human cognition typical of the authors of the latter half the 4th century, which is according to J. Daniélou a commonplace between pagan and Christian philosophy in the late Antiquity.[799] What Chrysostom underlines is the fact that even pretending that we can know the essence of God is true ignorance, madness, and even blasphemy[800] – the blasphemy which does not harm God but its author.[801] In order to visualize the absurdity of heretical views[802] to ordinary listeners, he uses simple examples:

---

794 *Hom.* III, 53–59 (SC 28bis, p. 190; tr. Harkins, p. 97).

795 *Cf. Hom.* I, 280–281 (SC 28bis, p. 124).

796 *Cf. Hom.* II, 473–480 (SC 28bis, p. 180). "But we do not know what the essence of the sky is." (tr. Harkins, p. 91).

797 *Cf. Hom.* III, 194–196 (SC 28bis, p. 202). "And why do I speak of that blessed essence of God? A man cannot even look upon the essence of an angel without fear and trembling" (tr. Harkins, p. 105); *Hom.*V, 257 (SC 28bis, p. 292). "But why do I speak of the essence of the angels when we do not even know well the essence of our own souls? Rather, we do not have any knowledge whatsoever of that essence" (tr. Harkins, p. 149).

798 *Cf. Hom.* V, 249–266 (SC 28bis, p. 292).

799 *Cf.* J. Daniélou, *Platonism et théologie mystique*, Paris 1953, p. 131.

800 *Cf. Hom.* V, 371–373 (SC 28bis, p. 302); *Hom.* I, 188–190 (SC 28, p. 116). "I urge you, then, to flee from the madness of these men. They are obstinately striving to know what God is in his essence. And I tell you that this is the ultimate madness" (tr. Harkins, p. 59); *Hom.* II, 163–165, (SC 28, pp. 154–156; tr. Harkins, p. 79).

801 *Cf. Hom.* III, 32–41 (SC 28bis, pp. 188–190). "In the same way, the man who hurls blasphemies at that blessed essence of God would never do any harm to it. God's essence is much too great and far too high to receive any hurt. The blasphemer is sharpening his sword against his own soul because he has become so arrogant toward his benefactor" (tr. Harkins, p. 96).

802 *Cf. Hom.* I, 190–195 (SC 28bis, p. 116). "Not only is it clear that the prophets do not know what his essence is but they do not even know how vast his wisdom is. Yet his essence does not come from his wisdom, but his wisdom

"How great is the distance between the knowledge which is going to be given to us and the knowledge which we now have? How great is the distance between a complete and perfect man and an infant at the breast? For that is the degree of superiority of the knowledge to come in comparison to our present knowledge."[803]

John compares an attempt to pretend of having full knowledge of divine essence with Adam's pride in paradise. The first man lost everything that he had received from God because he exceeded the set limits. Similarly, the Anomeans who claimed to have obtained perfect knowledge, which is impossible here on earth, would lose any possibility to know God in eternity.[804]

John explains that the impassable barrier in our cognition is based on the difference in nature:

> "…for the distance between God and man is as great as the distance between the potter and the clay. Rather the distance is not merely as great but much greater. The potter and the clay are of one and the same substance. It is just as Job said: 'I admit it as for those who dwell in houses of clay because we are ourselves formed from the same clay.'"[805]

The distance between the essence of God and the essence of man is so great that according to John neither words can express it, nor the mind can measure it.[806] It means that the exact knowledge of God is possible only for those who share the same nature with Him. When Chrysostom comments on the text that nobody knows the Father, he explains that the term "nobody" is always used to express the exclusion of creatures alone.[807] The

comes from his essence. When the prophets cannot perfectly comprehend his wisdom, how mad and foolish would the Anomoeans be to think that they could" (tr. Harkins, p. 59); *Hom.* II, 159–165 (SC 28bis, pp. 154–156). "Does this require refutation? Must I prove it not the mere utterance of the words enough to prove, godlessness of the Anomoeans? In these words we the obvious folly, an unpardonable madness, a new kind of piety and godlessness. (..)You miserable Anomoeans! Think of who you are and in things you are meddling" (tr. Harkins, p. 79).

803 *Hom.* I, 120–123 (SC 28bis, p. 106; tr. Harkins, p. 56).

804 *Cf. Hom.* I, 175–179 (SC 28bis, p. 114; tr. Harkins, p. 59).

805 *Hom.* II, 336–341 (SC 28bis, p. 170; tr. Harkins, p. 85).

806 *Cf. Hom.* II, 347–350 (SC 28bis, p. 170; tr. Harkins, p. 85).

807 *Cf. Hom.* V, 64–74 (SC 28bis, p. 276; tr. Harkins, p. 139).

knowledge about God exceeds our spiritual powers,[808] and he emphasizes the vanity of our human nature which is worthless compared not only with the excellence of God[809] but even with angels.[810] For Chrysostom, God is not only unknowable (ἀκατάλητος), but also inaccessible (ἀπρόσιτος), which is in this context even stronger.

> "However, he did not say: 'Who dwells in incomprehensible light,' but: 'in unapproachable light,' and this is much stronger than 'incomprehensible.' A thing is said to be incomprehensible when those who seek after it fail to comprehend it, even after they have searched and sought to understand it. A thing is unapproachable which, from the start, cannot be investigated nor can anyone come near to it. We call the sea incomprehensible because, even when divers lower themselves into its waters and go down to a great depth, they cannot find the bottom. We call that thing unapproachable which, from the start, cannot be searched out or investigated."[811]

---

808 *Cf. Hom.* III, 35–38 (SC 28bis, p. 188; tr. Harkins, p. 98).

809 *Cf. Hom.* II, 296–300 (SC 28bis, p. 166; tr. Harkins, p. 83); *Cf. Hom.* II, 166–177, (SC 28bis, p. 156). "You are only a man, and the bare names we call a man are enough to prove how excessive your madness is. A man is dust and ashes, flesh and blood, grass and the flower of grass, a shadow and smoke and vanity, and whatever is weaker and more worthless than these. And do not think that what I am saying is an accusation against nature. I am not the one who says this, but it is the prophets who are expressing their thoughts on the lowliness of man. Nor are they seeking to heap dishonor on humankind but they are trying to check the conceits of the foolish. Their aim is not to disparage our nature but to discourage the folly of those who are mad with pride" (tr. Harkins, p. 79).

810 *Cf. Hom.* III, 182–193 (SC 28bis, p. 202). "And the fact is that we do not know God in the same way in which those powers above know him. Their nature is far more pure and wise and clear-sighted than man's nature. The blind man does not know that the sun's rays are unapproachable as does the man who can see. So we do not know the incomprehensibility of God in the same way as these powers do. The difference between a blind man and a man with sight is as great as the difference between us men and the powers above. So, even if you hear the prophet say: 'I saw the Lord,' do not suspect that he saw God's essence. What he saw was this very condescension of God. And he saw that far less distinctly than did the powers above. He could not see it with the same clarity as the Cherubini" (tr. Harkins, pp. 104–105).

811 *Hom.* III, 124–133 (SC 28bis, pp. 196–198; tr. Harkins, p. 100). Ἀλλ' οὐδὲ φῶς οἰκῶν ἀκατάληπτον εἶπεν, ἀλλὰ ἀπρόσιτον, ὃ τοῦ ἀκαταλήπτου πολλῷ μεῖζόν ἐστι. Τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἀκατάληπτον λέγεται, ὅταν ἐρευνηθὲν καὶ ζητηθὲν μὴ καταληφθῇ παρὰ τῶν ζητούντων αὐτό· ἀπρόσιτον δέ στιν, ὃ μηδὲ ἐρεύνης ἀνέχεται τὴν ἀρχήν, μηδὲ ἐγγὺς αὐτοῦ γενέσθαι τις δύναται. Οἷον ἀκατάληπτον λέγεται πέλαγος, εἰς ὃ

Just like Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, John defends believers against the Eunomian accusation of not knowing God[812] and reminds that "All that we are required to know is that God exists; we are not asked to be busybodies and be inquisitive about his essence."[813] He makes a distinction between the knowledge we can receive from the revelation and human inquiries about the truth and understanding of divine mysteries.[814]

> "Paul said this because on the one hand he knows that God exists, whereas, on the other, he does not know what God is in his essence. He knows that God is wise but he does not know how great his wisdom is. He knows that God is great but he does not know how or what his greatness is. He also knows that God is everywhere present but he does not know how this is so. He knows that God provides for all things and that he preserves and governs them to perfection. But he does not know the way in which God does all these things. Therefore, he said: 'Our knowledge is imperfect and our prophesying is imperfect'."[815]

καθιέντες ἑαυτοὺς οἱ κολυμβηταὶ καὶ πρὸς πολὺ καταφερόμενοι βάθος, τὸ πέρας ἀδυνατοῦσιν εὑρεῖν· ἀπρόσιτον δὲ ἐκεῖνο λέγεται, ὃ μήτε τὴν ἀρχὴν ζητηθῆναι δυνατόν, μηδὲ ἐρευνηθῆναι.

812 *Cf*. *Hom*. V, 366–369 (SC 28bis, p. 302). "What is the wise objection and argument of these Anomoeans? They say: 'Do you not know what you are adoring?' *First and foremost*, we should not have to reply to this objection because the Scriptures afford such strong proof that it is impossible to know what God's essence is. But since our *purpose in* speaking *is not* to arouse their enmity but to correct them, come, let us show that being ignorant of God's essence but contending obstinately that one does know his essence, this is *really not to* know *him*" (tr. Harkins, p. 153).

813 *Hom*. V, 385–386 (SC 28bis, p. 304; tr. Harkins, p. 154).

814 *Cf*. *Hom*. I, 156–167 (SC 28bis, pp. 110–112). "I, too, know many things but I do not know how to explain them. I know that God is everywhere and I know that he is everywhere in his whole being. But I do not know how he is everywhere. I know that he is eternal and has no beginning. But I do not know how. My reason fails to grasp how it is possible for an essence to exist when that essence has received its existence neither from itself nor from another. I know that he begot a Son. But I do not know how. I know that the Spirit is from him. But I do not know how the Spirit is from him. [I eat food but I do not know how it is separated into phlegm, into blood, into juice, into bile. We do not even understand the foods which we see and eat every day. Will we be inquisitive, then, and meddle with the essence of God?]" (tr. Harkins, pp. 57–58).

815 *Hom*. I. 290–301 (SC 28bis, p. 126; tr. P.W. Harkins p. 65).

John does not hesitate to use privation or negation to describe God, and that fact can be clearly associated with not only Plato's, Philo's, and Clemet's inspiration, but also with the Bible.[816] We can see it in the use of such terms as: invisible ἀόρατος,[817] unspeakable ἄρρητος,[818] unreachable ἀπρόσιτος,[819] impossible to contemplate ἀθέατος, and many others.[820] The negative language is complemented by the transcendent descriptions with ὑπερ.[821] Like his predecessors, John believes that Christians will achieve the full knowledge of God in future life, but in the present state, they are not left without help as God can be seen by men or angels only by condescension (συγκατάβασις) and accommodation (ἐπιμετρέω). In his *Third Homily*, when John describes the knowledge of angels, he presents the definition of condescension:

> "Yet they did not see the pure light itself nor the pure essence itself. What they saw was a condescension accommodated to their nature. What is this condescension? God condescends whenever He is not seen as He is, but in the way one incapable of beholding Him is able to look upon Him. In this way God reveals Himself by accommodating what reveals to the weakness of vision of those who behold Him."[822]

According to John Chrysostom, God wants to be known by His creation but everything that was revealed to us about Him is very distant from the true knowledge about His nature.[823]

---

816 *Cf. e.g.* Rom 1: 20; 2 Cor 9: 15.
817 *Cf. Hom.* III, 54 (SC 28bis, p. 190).
818 *Cf. Hom.* IV, 61 (SC 28bis, p. 232).
819 *Cf. Hom.* III, 124 (SC 28bis, p. 196).
820 *Cf. Hom.* III, 45 (SC 28bis, p. 191). J. Daniélou, *Indroduction*, in: SC 28bis, pp. 17–18.
821 *Cf. Hom.* II, 192 (SC 28bis, p. 158); *Hom.* II, 297 (SC 28bis, p. 166).
822 *Hom.* III, 162–166 (SC 28bis, p. 200). Τί δέ ἐστι συγκατάβασις; Ὅταν μὴ ὡς ἔστιν ὁ Θεὸς φαίνηται, ἀλλ' ὡς ὁ δυνάμενος αὐτὸν θεωρεῖν οἷός τέ ἐστιν, οὕτως ἑαυτὸν δεικνύῃ, ἐπιμετρῶν τῇ τῶν ὁρώντων ἀσθενείᾳ τῆς ὄψεως τὴν ἐπίδειξιν" (SC 28bis, p. 200; tr. Harkins, pp. 101–102).
823 The same motif was used by Cyril of Jerusalem: "'What?', someone will say. 'Doesn't Scripture say that the angels of the little ones "always behold the face of my Father in heaven'" (Mt 18.10)? But the angels see God not as he is, but according to their capacity. For Jesus himself said: 'Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the one who is from God, he has seen the Father' (Jn 6.46). The angels see according to their capacity, and the archangels according to their ability; the Thrones and Dominations more than the first, but still fail

In the thought of all authors presented in this chapter, we could observe same schemes of demonstrating the incomprehensibility of God. The basic truth of the impossibility to know the essence of God is always defended, but there are different accents as well. While Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa present a more speculative attitude, for Gregory of Nazianzus and especially for John Chrysostom, a pastoral approach is more natural. But this does not mean that such pastoral care was less important, since the Anomeans were effective not only in the field of doctrinal demonstrations, but also in their missionary activity.

Finally, it is worth adding that those four writers are the most famous ones, and, therefore, they are the best examples of a rapid development of negative theology in the late 4th century. But they certainly are not all writers who contributed to the growing interest in negative theology in the latter half of the 4th century. Among others worthy of mentioning is Cyril of Jerusalem[824] and Didymus the Blind, who also accepted the basic outcome of the debate, namely that the essence of God is incomprehensible.

---

to do him justice." Cyril of Jerusalem, Cat. VI, 6 (PG 33, 548 B), in. *Cyril of Jerusalem*, ed. tr. E. Yarnold, London, New York, 2000, p. 117.

824 It is worth quoting at least one quote from Cyril of Jerusalem's orations which shows that negative theology was commonly present at that time: "For we do not say as much as needs to be said about God, but as much as human nature can grasp and our weakness can bear. We do not explain what God is; we admit with a good grace that we do not know the exact truth about him. For in what concerns God the height of knowledge is to admit one's ignorance" (*Cat*. VI; 1; PG 33, 357A-340 B; tr. Yarnold, p. 115).

Conclusion

Our discussion showed clearly that in the later 4th century, we can observe a significant growth of the importance of negative theology. This was certainly caused by the Anomean thesis that the substance of God is comprehensible. However, since for all Christian writers the basic reference is the Holy Scripture, both the opponents and the supporters of negative theology could certainly find the source of their opinions in the Old and the New Testament. As we have seen, the Bible is ambiguous on the topic of comprehensibility of God, who reveals Himself but simultaneously hides His face. Therefore, there was not one and only interpretation of the Christian doctrine on how to know God, and in the Early Church both positions could see themselves as being in accordance with the Orthodoxy. For Apologists, who opposed pagan conceptions of God, a confirmation that Christians possess true knowledge revealed in the Holy Scripture was coherent with the claims that pagans have a false conception of God, whose true nature is incomprehensible. Similarly, we have observed that later Clement of Alexandria sustained strong aphairetic claims, while for Origen incomprehensibility of God was merely a marginal issue. It must be noted that the works of Philo of Alexandria were held in high esteem especially by Clement of Alexandria but also by later Christian writers, but their influence exerted a special mark in the case of negative theology.

The situation of the ambiguous attitude of Christians to negative theology continues at the beginning of the 4th century. If our reconstruction of the claims of Arius is right, we can assume that for him negative theology was an important idea in arguing on the difference between the Father and the Son. While the Son, who is also Logos and Wisdom, is known to us, Father stays beyond the powers of human intellect and remains unknown. Because of such difference in comprehensibility, Arius could argue on the similar, but not the same essence of the Son of God. It is also significant that Athanasius, the most important opponent of Arius, has a significantly more positive attitude to the possibility of knowing God by man, but because of the strong division between the Creator and creations, he saw this possibility as the effect of the perfection of God's revelation in Christ rather than

in the power of human intellect, weakened by the fall into sensual things, caused by sin.

Another opponent of Arius – Marius Victorinus was also a Neoplatonic who rejected negative theology, so using Neoplatonic sources he tried to establish the ultimate mode of speaking of God as transcendental synthesis, in which negative and positive theologies were somehow reconciled, since this transcendent mode of speaking is above affirmation and negation. Thanks to such reasoning, Marius Victorinus was able to reject the opposition between two mode theologies as the way of showing dissimilarity of the Father and the Son.

The problem of the comprehensibility of God became a fundamental issue upon the rise of the Neo-Arian movement of Anomeans. However, the doctrine of the first important Heteroousian – Aetius – was rather pointed at showing inconsistencies and contradictions of the Orthodox convictions. He also focused the discussion on the positive meaning of the main name of God, which was "Ingeneracy." Although we find those topics in the writings of his disciple Eunomius, he shifted the Anomean doctrine to an entirely new level.

Eunomius popularized Anomean opinions, and it seems that he also played a paramount role in establishing the most troublesome way of the discussion with the Orthodox by coming up with the question which led to a paradox: "Do you worship what you know, or what you do not know?" The question itself focuses the discussion on the problem of the comprehensibility of God, and, therefore, to answer it the Orthodox were forced to enter into the discussion on the possibility of knowing the essence of the one who is worshipped by Christians. There is also another very important aspect which this question introduces. It shows that for the Christians of the 4th century, comprehensibility of God was not a theoretical issue but had a fundamental impact on the practical issue of proper worship of God.

Eunomius not only focused on showing the contradictions in the claims of the opponents, but also proposed new ways to demonstrate the comprehensibility of the essence of God. As we have seen, the key concept in his theological methods was the idea of activity of God. Therefore, to understand Eunomius' doctrine, it was necessary to trace the problem of ἐνέργεια from its beginnings. This historical view allowed us to see that Eunomius had predecessors in using this term, and he could be convinced

that by placing ἐνέργεια in his system he only made the exegesis of the passages from the Holy Scripture. But it was Eunomius who ascribed such great importance to activities of God, and it seems that the two ways of theology based on the relationships between οὐσία and ἐνέργεια were his own invention. Whereas the second way (from activity to substance) was in a sense already present in earlier writings, the first way (from substance to activity) was rather entirely his own invention.

It is significant that the opponents of Eunomius (mainly Gregory of Nyssa) do not undermine the importance of the relationship between οὐσία and ἐνέργεια in their polemic. The first method of Eunomius, since it depended on the previous knowledge of essence, thanks to the theory of names, which stated that the name "Unbegotten" signified and to some extent was the essence of God, was entirely unacceptable for the Orthodox. Especially, Basil of Caesarea noted that undermining the theory of names will effectively invalidate Eunomius' first way. If one demonstrates that it is impossible to know the essence, thanks to the name "Unbegotten," argumentation concerning the character of the activity of generation from essence is pointless.

Gregory of Nyssa, especially in the first book of his *Contra Eunomium*, focuses on the second method, which leads from activity to substance. But this time the method itself is not the object of criticism. Gregory concentrates rather on explaining that although the method is not invalid, Eunomius did not understand it correctly. At this point, we have observed that Gregory argued for two kinds of the activities of God. Internal activities that are eternal and infinite acts which take place in the essence of God are completely incomprehensible since they are identical with the substance. Therefore, generation of the Son also cannot be comprehended by any act of human intellect. But there are also external activities, by which we can recognize God's presence in the creations. Here Gregory agrees that they can give us certain knowledge, but it is the comprehension of the activities only, not of the essence of God. As we have seen Gregory is convinced that the knowledge which we can obtain is true because it is the knowledge of activities. Therefore, the doctrine of activities allows him to secure the validity of human knowledge, while at the same time he was able to draw a clear borderline beyond which any intellectual perception is impossible.

In the case of Gregory, we could see once again that the problem of the comprehensibility of God is not only a theoretical issue, but is closely

related with the way of man towards unity with God. The concept of activities is so important because the first place where God reveals himself is the soul of man. Therefore, the activities present in human soul are indispensable when man enters the way towards unity with God; they assure him that God is present and that he is on the right path. It is indispensable since the ascent of the soul is infinite, and all the time the soul merely gets closer to God and never reaches Him. Gregory then shows that total incompressibility of God is the fundamental truth of mystical life, which cannot be conceived without accepting insufficiency of the constantly performed efforts to know God to whom the soul ascends.

The examination of the thought of two other figures of the 4th century: Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom allowed us to observe that the incomprehensibility of God was the strongest sign of being Orthodox at that time. The best way to reject the doctrine of Eunomians and to weaken their missionary activity was to argue on the impossibility of knowing the essence of God, and, therefore, it became the main topic of the orations of Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom.

There is another common feature of those doctrines which can be observed in all four authors presented in the last chapter. Although for the purpose of the polemic they constantly repeat the truth of the incomprehensibility of God, we can also notice the effort to show that negative theology does not conclude in making spiritual life pointed at nothingness. Admitting the insufficiency of human reason is a necessary statement on the limits of intellect, but not on the absence of the object of belief. Even for Gregory of Nyssa, who is certainly "most negative" of them, God, who can never be fully reached, is constantly present in the cloud and in darkness. But this effort to show that God is present and reachable to some extent is the symptom of certain uneasiness, that going too deeply into negative theology would result in missing God on the mystical path.

The two fundamental effects of the 4th-century debate on the comprehensibility of God can be seen in a later development of Christian theology. Especially thanks to the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, the claim on the incomprehensibility of the essence of God will settle for good in Christian thought. Gregory formulated the strongest negative theology until his time and found that equally strong negative statements could be found earlier. But it was not the end of the development of negative theology. Thanks

to the new understanding of apophatic statements presented by Proclus, Christian negative theology will flourish in the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite, who seemed to be under Gregory's influence.[825]

Another outcome of the debate can be seen in a further development of the concept of the Divine activities. Although after the Cappadocians the interest in the topic significantly diminished, it gained a new life in the system of the same Dionysius the Areopagite.[826] Thanks to the thought of the unknown author of *Corpus Dionysiacum*, the doctrine of activities became the fundament of the Eastern theological tradition because of its development in Maximus the Confessor and in the Middle Ages in Gregory Palamas.[827]

Therefore, it seems that Christian theology and especially Christian mysticism owe much to the debate between Eunomius and the Cappadocians. But the importance of the debate goes beyond Christian theology and has much to offer also to natural theology, philosophy of religion, and even metaphysics. Because of a growing interest in negative theology in those field of studies, it seems that one of the most important debates on this topic which took place as long ago as in the 4th century AD is still worth taking into account.

825 *Cf*. Y. de Andia remarks on similarities between Gregory and Denys the Areopagite in: *Henosis. L'Union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite*, Leiden, New York, Köln 1996, pp. 17–18; 306; on the stages of mystical life: pp. 356–360; 371–373; especially on the divine darkness: pp. 334–342.

826 *Cf*. D. Bradshaw, *op. cit*., p. 179.

827 *Cf*. *ibid*., pp. 188–220; 234–242.

Bibliography

Texts and translations

Aetius, *Syntagmation* (=*Synt.*); ed. L.R. Wickham, *The Syntagmation of Aetius*, JTS 19 (1968), pp. 532–569.

Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* (=*Didasc.*); Alcinoos, *Enseignement des doctrines de Platon*, ed. J. Whittaker, Paris 1990; Alcinous, *The Handbook of Platonism*, tr. J. Dillon, Oxford 1993.

Aristotle, *Aristotelis Opera*, ed. I. Bekker, 2nd ed., revision O. Gigon, vol. 1–2, Berlin 1960; *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. J. Barnes, vol. 1–2, Oxford 1984.

Aristotle, *Analytica Priora* (=*Anal. Pr.*); *Analytica Posteriora* (=*Anal. Post.*); *Aristotle's Prior and Posterior Analytics*, ed. W.D. Ross, Oxford 1957.

Aristotle, *Categoriae* (=*Cat.*); Aristote, *Catégories*, ed. R. Bodéüs, Paris 2001.

Aristotle, *De anima*

Aristotle, *De interpretatione*

Aristotle, *De generatione animalium* (= *De gen. anim.*)

Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea* (=*Eth. Nic.*); Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. R. Crisp, Cambridge 2000.

Aristotle, *Metaphysica* (=*Met.*); Aristotle, *Metaphysics Book Θ*, tr. S. Makin, Oxford 2006.

Aristotle, *Protrepticus* (=*Protrep.*)

Aristotle, *Topica* (=*Top.*)

Athansius, *Contra Gentes* (=*Con. Gen.*); Athanasius, *Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, tr. R.W. Thomson, Oxford 1971.

Athansius, *De decretis Niceane synodi*; *Athanasius Werke*, ed. H.G. Opitz, vol. I/2, Berlin, Leipzig 1935; NPNF II, vol. 4, ed. P. Schaff, Oxford, London 1892.

Athansius, *De Incarnatione* (=*De Inc.*); Athanasius, *Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, tr. R.W. Thomson, Oxford 1971.

Athansius, *De Synodis Arimini in Italia et Seleuciae in Isauria* (=*De Synodis*); *Athanasius Werke*, ed. H.G. Opitz, vol. I/2, Berlin, Leipzig 1935; NPNF II, vol. 4, ed. P. Schaff, Oxford and London 1892.

Athansius, *Epistula ad episcopos Aegypti at Libyae*; PG 25, J.P. Migne, Paris 1857; NPNF II, ed. P. Schaff, vol. 4, Oxford, London 1892.

Athansius, *Epistula ad Serapionem* (=*Ep. ad Serap.*); *Athanasius Werke*, I/I/4, ed. K. Savvidis, Berlin 2010; *The Letters of St Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit*, tr. C.R.B. Shapland, London 1951.

Athansius, *Orationes Contra Arianos* (=*Orat. cont. Arian.*); St. Ahtanasius, *Orations against the Arians*, ed. W. Bright, Oxford 1884; NPNF II, vol. 4, ed. P. Schaff, Oxford, London 1892.

Athenagoras, *Libellus pro Christianis*; SC 379, ed. B. Pouderon, Paris 1992; ANF, vol. 2, ed. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, Boston 1885.

Augustine of Hippo, *De quantitate animae*; *Opere di Sant' Agostino*, t. III/2, ed. A. Trape, Roma 1976; St Augustine, *The Magnitude of the Soul*, tr. J.J. MacMahon, Washington 1947.

Basil of Caesarea, *Contra Eunomium* (=*Con. Eun.*); SC 299, 305, ed. B. Sesboüe, Paris 1982–1983; St. Basil of Cesarea, *Against Eunomius*, tr. M. DelCogliano, A. Radde-Gallwitz, Washington 2011.

Basil of Caesarea, *Epistulae* (=*Ep.*); Saint Basile, *Lettres*, ed. Y. Courtonne, vols. 1–3, Paris 1957–1966; Saint Basil, *The Letters*, ed. R.J. Deferrari, vols. 1–4, London, New York 1926–1934.

Basil of Caesarea, *Homilia in illud Attende tibi ipsi*, PG 31, 197D – 217B, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris 1857.

Basil of Caesarea, *Homiliae in Hexaemeron* (=*In Hex.*); SC 26, ed. S. Giet, Paris 1968; Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron*, London, 2013.

Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta ex Theodoto*; SC 23, ed. F. Sagnard, Paris 1948; *The Excerpta ex Theodoto of Clement of Alexandria*, tr. R. Pierce Casey, London 1934.

Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* (=*Strom.*); *Clemens Alexandrinus II*, GCS 15, ed. O. Stählin, Leipzig 1906; *Clemens Alexandrinus III*, GCS 17, ed. O. Stählin, Leipzig 1909; *Stromate I*, SC 30, ed. M. Castel, Paris 1951; *Stromate II*, SC 38, ed. CL. Mondésert, Paris 1954; *Stromate V*, SC 278, 279, ed. A. le Boulluec, Paris 1981; *Stromate VII*, SC 428, ed. A. le Boulluec, Paris 1997; ANF, vol. 2, ed. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, Boston 1885.

Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* (=*Cat.*); PG 33, 331–1181, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris 1857.

Dexippus, *Dexippi in Aristotelis categorias commentarium*, CAG 4/2, ed. A. Busse, Berlin 1888.

Ephphanius, *Panarion*; Epiphanius III, *Panarion haer. 65–80*, GCS 37, ed. J. Dummer, Berlin 1985.

Ephphanius, *Epistula ad Diognetum* (=*Ep. ad Diog.*); SC 33, ed. H.I. Marrou, Paris 1951; ANF, vol. 1, ed. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, Edinburgh 1897.

Eunomius, *The Extant Works*, ed. and tr. R.P. Vaggione, New York 2002; SC 305, ed. B. Sesboüe, Paris 1983.

Eunomius, *Fragmenta* (=*Frag.*)

Eunomius, *Liber Apologeticus* (= LA).

Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes* (=*Or.*); PG 23, 396–1252, PG 36, 9–623, J.P. Migne, Paris 1857; *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning. The Five Theological Orations of Gregory of Nazianzen*, intr. and com. F.W. Norris, tr. L. Wickham, F. Williams, Leiden 1991.

Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* (=CE); *Contra Eunomium Libri*, GNO I–II, ed. W. Jaeger, Leiden 1960; Contra Eunomium I, tr. S.G. Hall, in: *El 'Contra Eunomium I' en la produccion literaria de Gregorio de Nisa*, ed. L. Mateo-Seco, J. Bastero, Pamplona 1988; Contra Eunomium II, tr. S.G. Hall, in: Gregory of Nyssa: *Contra Eunomium II. An English Version with Supporting Studies*, ed. L. Karfíková, S. Douglass, J. Zachhuber, Leiden, Boston 2007; Contra Eunomium III, tr. S.G. Hall, in: Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium III. An English Translation with Commentary and Supporting Studies*, ed. J. Leemans, M. Cassin, Leiden, Boston 2014.

Gregory of Nyssa, *De beatitudinibus*, (=*De Beat.*); GNO VII/2, ed. J.F. Callahan, Leiden, 1992; tr. S.G. Hall in: Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on Beatitudes. An English Version with Commentary and Supporting Studies*, ed. H.R. Drobner, A. Viciano, Leiden 2000.

Gregory of Nyssa, *De infantibus praemature abreptis* (=*Inf.*); GNO III/2, ed. H. Polack, i H. Hörner, Leiden 1987; NPNF II, vol. 5, ed. H. Wace, P. Shaff, New York 1893.

Gregory of Nyssa, *De vita Moysis*; SC 1, ed. J. Daniélou, Paris 1955; *The Life of Moses*, tr. A.J. Malherbe, E. Ferguson, New York, 1978.

Gregory of Nyssa, *In Canticum Canticorum* (=*In Cant.*); *Gregory of Nyssa, Homilies on the Song of Songs*, ed. and tr. R.A. Norris Jr., Atlanta 2012.

Gregory of Nyssa, *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii*; GNO II, ed. W. Jaeger, Leiden 1960; NPNF II, vol. 5, ed. H. Wace, P. Shaff, New York 1893.

Hieronymus, *De viris illustribus*, PL 23, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris 1883.

Holy Scripture, *Septuagint*, 2 vols., ed. A. Rahlfs, Stuttgart 1982.

Holy Scripture, *Novum testmentum Graece*, Nestle-Aland, Hendrickson Publishers 2012; *Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, ed. M.D. Coogan, Oxford 2010; Revised Standard Version - Catholic Edition, San Francisco 1966.

John Chrysostom, *De incomprhensibili Dei natura* (=*Hom.*), SC 28bis, Jean Chrysostome, *Sur l'incompréhensibilité de Dieu*, ed. J. Daniélou, tr. R. Flaciére Paris 2000; St. John Chrysostom, *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, tr. P.W. Harkins, Washington 1984.

Justin Martyr, *Apologia* (=*1 Apol.*), *Apologia secunda* (=*2 Apol.*); Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, *Apologies*, ed. D. Minns, P. Parvis, Oxford 2009.

Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone* (=*Dial.*); PTS 47, ed. M. Marcovich, Berlin 1997; St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ed. M. Slusser, tr. T.B. Falls, Washington 2003.

Marius Victorinus, *Traités Théologiques sur la Trinité*, SC 68, ed. P. Hadot, Paris 1960; *Theological Treaties on the Trinity*, tr. M.T. Clark, Washington 1981.

Marius Victorinus, *Adversus Arium* (=*Adv. Ar.*)

Marius Victorinus, *Ad Candidum* (=*Ad Cand.*)

Marius Victorinus, *Candidi Epistola I* (=*Cand. I*).

Origen, *Commentarii in evagelium Ioahnnis* (=*In Ioann.*); SC 120, ed. C. Blanc, Paris 1966; Origen, *Commentary on the Gospell According to John Books 1-10*, tr. R.E. Heine, Washington 1989.

Origen, *De principiis* (=*De Princ.*); *Traité des principes I–II*, SC 252–253, ed. H. Crouzel, M. Simonetti, Paris 1978; *Traité des principes III–IV*, SC 268–269, ed. H. Crouzel, M. Simonetti, Paris 1980; ANF, vol. 4, ed. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, New York 1926.

Philo of Alexandria, *Philo in Ten Volumes*, ed. and tr. F.H. Colson, G.H. Whitaker, *repr.* Harvard 1981–1991.

Philo of Alexandria, *De Abrahamo* (=*Abr.*)

Philo of Alexandria, *De Cherubim* (=*Cher.*)

Philo of Alexandria, *De Congressu Eruditionis gratia* (=*Cong.*)

Philo of Alexandria, *De Fuga et Inventione* (=*Fug.*)

Philo of Alexandria, *De Mutatione Nominum* (=*Mut.*)

Philo of Alexandria, *De Posteritate Caini* (=*Post.*)

Philo of Alexandria, *De Somniis* (=*Som.*)

Philo of Alexandria, *De Specialibus Legibus* (=*Spec.*).

Philoponus, *In Aristotelis Analytica Posteriora*, CAG, vol. 13, ed. M. Wallies, Berlin 1909; *On Aristotle Posterior Analytics* 2, tr. O. Goldin, Bloomsbury 2014.

Plato, *Epistulae* (=*Ep.*); *Platonis Opera V*, ed. J. Burnet, Oxford 1907.

Plato, *Meno*; *Platonis Opera III*, ed. J. Burnet, Oxford 1902; Plato, *Meno and Other Dialogues*, tr. R. Waterfield, Oxford 2005.

Plato, *Parmenides* (=*Parm.*); *Platonis Opera II*, ed. J. Burnet, Oxford 1901; *Plato's Parmenides*, ed. A. Hermann, Las Vegas 2010.

Plato, *Phaedo*; *Platonis Opera I*, ed. J. Burnet, Oxford 1901; *Plato*, *Phaedo*, tr. D. Gallop, Oxford 1975.

Plato, *Phaedrus* (=*Phaed.*); *Platonis Opera II*, ed. J. Burnet, Oxford 1901; Plato, *Phaedrus*, tr. R. Waterfield, Oxford 2002.

Plato, *Respublica* (=*Resp.*); *Platonis Opera IV*, ed. J. Burnet, Oxford 1902; Plato, *Republic*, tr. C.D.C. Reeve, Cambridge 2004.

Plato, *Sophista* (=*Soph.*); *Platonis Opera I*, ed. J. Burnet, Oxford 1901; *Plato's Theory of Knowledge. The Theatetus and the Sophist*, tr. F. MacDonald Conford, London 1935.

Plato, *Symposium*; *Platonis Opera II*, ed. J. Burnet, Oxford 1901; *Plato, The Symposium*, tr. M.C. Howatson, Cambrigde 2008.

Plato, *Timaeus* (=*Tim.*); *Platonis Opera IV*, ed. J. Burnet, Oxford 1922; *Plato*, *Timaeus and Critias*, tr. R. Waterfield, Oxford 2008.

Plotinus, *Enneades* (=*Enn.*); *Plotini Opera*, ed. P. Henry, H.R. Schwyzer, vol, I–III, Oxford 1964-1983; *Plotinus*, *The Six Enneads*, tr. S. MacKenna, B.S. Page, Chicago 1952.

Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* (=*HE*); GCS NF 1, ed. G.C. Hansen, Berlin 1995.

Stobaeus, *Anthologium* (=*Ant.*); *Ioannis Stobaei Anthologium*, ed. C. Wachsmuth, O. Hense, vols. 1–5, Berlin 1884–1912.

Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* (=*Or. ad Graec.*); PTS 43/44, ed. M. Marcovich, Berlin 1995; ANF, vol. 2, ed. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, Boston 1885.

Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolycum* (=*Ad Autol.*); SC 20, ed. G. Bardy, Paris 1948; ANF, vol. 2, ed. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, Boston 1885.

Secondary Literature

Aghiorgoussis M., *Image as Sign* (*Sēmeion*) *of God*, GOThR, 21 (1976), pp. 19–54.

Anatolios K., *Athanasius. The Coherence of His Thought*, London, New York 2005.

Andia Y. de, *Henosis. L'Union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite*, Leiden, New York, Köln 1996.

Armstrong A.H., *The Background of the Doctrine That Intelligibles Are Not Outside the Intellect*, in: *Les sources de Plotin*, ed. Entretiens Hardt, vol. 5, Vandoeuvres, Geneva 1960, pp. 391–425.

Balás D.L., *Eternity and Time in Gregory of Nyssa's Contra Eunomium*, in: *Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie*, ed. H. Dörie, M. Altenburger, U. Schramm, Leiden 1976, pp. 128–155.

Balentine S.E., *The Hidden God*, Oxford 1993.

Barnes M.R., *Power of God. Δύναμις in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology*, Washington 2001.

Barnes M.R., *The Background and Use of Eunomius' Causal Language*, in: *Arianism after Arius*, ed. M.R. Barnes, D.H. Williams, Edinburgh 1993, pp. 217–236.

Beeley Ch. A., *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God. In Your Light We Shall See Light*, Oxford 2008.

Beere J., *Doing and Being. An Interpretation of Aristotle's "Metaphysics" Theta*, Oxford 2009.

Benedict XVI, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, tr. A. Walker, San Francisco 1995.

Birjukov D., *Strategies of Naming in the Polemic between Eunomius and Basil of Cesarea in the Context of the Philosophical Tradition of Antiquity*, Scrinium IV (2008), pp. 104–121.

Bradshaw D., *Aristotle East and West. Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom*, Cambridge 2004.

Brouwer R., *The Early Stoic on Wisdom*, *Sagehood and Socrates*, Cambridge 2014.

Carabine D., *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eriugena*, Eugene 1995.

Daley B.E., *Gregory of Nazianzus*, New York 2006.

Daniélou J., *Eunome l'Arien et l' exégèse néo-platonicienne du Cratyle*, Revue des études grecques 69 (1956), pp. 412–432.

Daniélou J., *Philo of Alexandria*, tr. J.G. Colbert, Cambridge 2014.

Daniélou J., *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, Paris 1944.

DelCogliano M., *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names*, Leiden, Boston 2010.

Diekamp F., *Literargeschichtliches zu der Eunomianischen Kontroverse*, Byzantinische Zeitschrift 18 (1909), pp. 1–13.

Dillon J., *The Knowledge of God in Origen*, in: *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. R. van den Broeck, T. Baarda, J. Mansfeld, Brill 1988, pp. 219–228.

Doods E.R., *The Parmenides of Plato and the Origin of Neoplatonic One*, The Classical Quarterly 22 (1928), pp. 129–142.

Droge A.J., *Self-definition vis-à-vis the Graeco-Roman World*, in: *Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 1. *Origins to Constantine*, ed. M.M. Mitchell, F.M. Young, Cambridge 2008, pp. 230–244.

Festugière A.J., *La révélation d`Hermès Trismégeste*, *IV*, *Le dieu inconnu et la gnôse*, Paris 1986.

Gwynn D.M., *The Eusebians. The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the 'Arian Controversy'*, Oxford 2007.

Hadot P., *Porphyre et Victorinus*, Paris 1968.

Hägg F., *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism*, Oxford 2014.

Hamilton A., *Athanasius and the Simile of the Mirror*, VCh, 34/1 (1980), pp. 14–18.

Hanson R.P.C., *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God. The Arian Controversy*, *318–381*, Grand Rapids 2005.

Harari O., *Knowledge and Demonstration. Aristotle's Posterior Analytics*, Springer 2004.

Henry P., *Plotin et l'Occident*, Louvain 1934.

Itter A.C., *Esoteric Teaching in the Stromateis of Clement of Alexandria*, Leiden, Boston 2009.

Ivanka E. von, *Vom Platonismus zur Theorie der Mystik*, Scholastik 11 (1936), pp. 178–185.

Kochańczyk-Bonińska K., *Basil the Great's References to Eunomius*, Vox Patrum 37/68 (2017) t. pp. 119–128.

Kopecek T.A., *A History of Neo-Arianism*, Cambridge 1979.

Larchet J.C., *La théologie des énergies divines. Des origines à saint Jean Damascène*, Paris 2010.

Larid M., *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith. Union, Knowledge, and Divine Presence*, Oxford 2004.

Lloyd A.C., *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism*, Oxford 1990.

Lossky V., *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Cambridge 1973.

Louth A., *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition from Plato to Denys*, Oxford 2007.

Ludlow M., *Contra Eunomium III – Who is Eunomius?* in: *Gregory of Nyssa, Contra Eunomium III*, ed. Johan Leemans, M. Cassin, Leiden, Boston 2014, pp. 442–474.

Ludlow M., *Gregory of Nyssa, Ancient and (Post)modern*, Oxford 2007.

Lyman J.R., *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius*, Oxford 1993.

Marrou H.I., *Synesius of Cyrene and Alexandrian Neo-Platonism*, in: *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. A. Momigliano, Oxford 1963, pp. 126–150.

Maspero G., *Energy*, in: *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. L.F. Mateo-Seco, G. Maspero, Leiden, Boston 2010, pp. 258–262.

Maspero G., *Trinity and Man. Gregory of Nyssa "Ad Ablabium"*, Leiden, Boston 2007.

Mates B., *Stoic Logic*, Berkeley 1961.

Meinwald C.C., *Good-bye to the Third Man*, in: *Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. R. Kraut, Cambridge 1992, pp. 365–396.

Meredith A., *Studies in the Contra Eunomium of Gregory or Nyssa*, Oxford 1972.

Moreschini C., *Luce e purificazione nella dottrina di Gregorio Nazianzeno*, Augustinianum 13/3 (1973), pp. 535–549.

Morley R., *Alien God in Arius*, in: *Platonism in the Late Antiquity*, ed. S. Gersh, Ch. Kannengeisser, Notre Dame 1992, pp. 205–215.

Morley R., *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, *Christian and Greek*, Bonn 1986.

Nautin P., *Candidus l'Arien*, *in L'Homme devant Dieu*, in: *Mélanges offerts au H. de Lubac*, vol. 1, Paris 1964, pp. 309–320.

Osborn E., *Clement of Alexandria*, Cambridge 2005.

Palmer D.W., *Atheism*, *Apologetic*, *and Negative Theology in the Greek Apologists of the Second Century*, VCh 37/3 (1983), pp. 234–259.

Pelikan J., *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Teology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism*, London 1993.

Pinault H., *Le platonisme de Saint Grégoire de Nazianze*: *Essai sur les relations du christianisme et de l'hellénisme dans son oeuvre théologique*, Paris 1925.

Plagnieux J., *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze théologien*, Paris 1952.

Priest G, *The Parmenides: a Dialethic Interpretation*, in: *Plato*, *The Electronic Journal of the International Plato Society* 12 (2012), pp. 1–63.

Radde-Gallwitz A., *Basil of Cesarea*, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, Oxford 2009.

Rist J., *Basil's "Neoplatonism": Its Background and Nature*, in: *Basil of Caesarea: Christian*, *Humanist*, *Ascetic*, ed. P. Fedwick, Toronto, 1981, pp. 137–220.

Robertson D.G., *A Patristic Theory of Proper Names*, Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie 84 (2002), pp. 1–19.

Robertson D.G., *Relatives in Basil of Caesarea*, Studia Patristica 37 (2001), pp. 277–287.

Robertson D.G., *Stoic and Aristotelian Notions of Substance in Basil of Caesarea*, VCh 52/4 (1998), pp. 393–417.

Robertson J.M., *Christ as Mediator. A Study of the Theologies of Eusebius of Caesarea*, *Marcellus of Ancyra and Athanasius of Alexandria*, Oxford 2007.

Rousseau P., *Basil of Caesarea*, Berkeley 1994.

Runia D.T., *Clement of Alexandria and the Philonic Doctrine of the Divine Power(s)*, VCh 58/3 (2004), pp. 256–276.

Russell, N. *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, Oxford 2004.

Schneider C., *Beyond Agnostisism and Pantheism*, in: *Divine Essence and Divine Energies*, ed. C. Athanasopoulos, C. Schneider, Cambridge 2013, pp. 9–26.

Simmons J.A., *Old Questions and New Frontiers in Philosophy of Religion*, in: *Contemporary Debates in Negative Theology and Philosophy*, ed. N. Brown, J.A. Simmons, Palgrave Macmillan 2017.

Smith A., *Eternity and Time*, in: *Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. L.P. Gerson, Cambridge 1996, pp. 196–216.

Spidlik T., *Grégoire de Nazianze. Introduction a l'etude de sa doctrine spirituelle*, Rome 1971.

Stang Ch.M., *Negative Theology from Gregory of Nyssa to Dionysius the Areopagite*, in: *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. J.M. Lang, Oxford 2013, pp. 161–176.

Stead C., *Was Arius a Neoplatonist?*, in: *Doctrine and Philosophy in Early Christianity*, Burlington 2000, pp. 39–52.

Stead C., *Ontologie und Terimniologie bei Gregor von Nyssa*, in: *Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie*, ed. H. Dörie, M. Altenburger, U. Schramm, Leiden 1976, pp. 107–119.

Stead C., *The Platonism of Arius*, JTS 15 (1964), pp. 16–31.

Stead C., *The Word "From Nothing"*, in: *Doctrine and Philosophy in Early Christianity*, Burlington 2000, pp. 671–684.

Stępień T., *Created or Uncreated Wisdom? Arguments on Christ as the Wisdom of God in the Polemic of Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa Against Eunomius*, in: *Sophia. The Wisdom of God*, ed. Th. Hainthaler, F. Mali, G. Emmenegger, M.L. Ostermann, Insbruck, Wien 2017, pp. 147–155.

Stępień T., *Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis – Belief as a Form of Natural Cognition in Writings of St Augustine's*, Studia Pelplińskie XLIX (2016), pp. 287–301.

Tarrant H.A.S., *Plato's First Interpreters*, New York 2000.

Vaggione R.P., *Eunomius of Cysiucs and the Nicene Revolution*, Oxford 2000.

Van den Hoek A., *Good Beyond Knowing: Clement of Alexandria and Discourse on God*, in: *God in Early Christian Thought*, ed. A.B. Mc Govan, B.E. Daley, T.J. Gaden, Leiden, Boston 2009, pp. 37–60.

Williams R., *Arius Heresy and Tradition*, Grand Rapids 2002.

Wolfson H.A., Philosophical Implications of Arianism and Apollinarianism, DOP 12 (1958), pp. 4–28.

Yarnold E., *Cyril of Jerusalem*, London, New York 2000.

Zachhuber J., *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*, Leiden, Boston 2014.

Index

B

C

D

E

F

G

H

I

T

V

W

Y

Z

European Studies in Theology, Philosophy and History of Religions

Edited by Bartosz Adamczewski

Vol. 1 Bartosz Adamczewski: Retelling the Law. Genesis, Exodus-Numbers, and Samuel-Kings as Sequential Hypertextual Reworkings of Deuteronomy. 2012.

Vol. 2 Jacek Grzybowski (ed.): Philosophical and Religious Sources of Modern Culture. 2012.

Vol. 3 Bartosz Adamczewski: Hypertextuality and Historicity in the Gospels. 2013.

Vol. 4 Edmund Morawiec: Intellectual Intuition in the General Metaphysics of Jacques Maritain. A Study in the History of the Methodology of Classical Metaphysics. 2013.

Vol. 5 Edward Nieznański: Towards a Formalization of Thomistic Theodicy. Formalized Attempts to Set Formal Logical Bases to State First Elements of Relations Considered in the Thomistic Theodicy. 2013.

Vol. 6 Mariusz Rosik: “In Christ All Will Be Made Alive” (1 Cor 15:12-58). The Role of Old Testament Quotations in the Pauline Argumentation for the Resurrection. 2013.

Vol. 7 Jan Krokos: Conscience as Cognition. Phenomenological Complementing of Aquinas’s Theory of Conscience. 2013.

Vol. 8 Bartosz Adamczewski: The Gospel of Mark. A Hypertextual Commentary. 2014.

Vol. 9 Jacek Grzybowski: Cosmological and Philosophical World of Dante Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy* as a Medieval Vision of the Universe. 2015.

Vol. 10 Dariusz Karłowicz: The Archparadox of Death. Martyrdom as a Philosophical Category. 2016.

Vol. 11 Monika Ożóg: *Inter duas potestates*: The Religious Policy of Theoderic the Great. Translated by Marcin Fijak. 2016.

Vol. 12 Marek Dobrzeniecki: The Conflicts of Modernity in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. 2016.

Vol. 13 Bartosz Adamczewski: The Gospel of Luke. A Hypertextual Commentary. 2016.

Vol. 14 Paweł Rytel-Andrianik: Manna – Bread from Heaven. Jn 6:22-59 in the Light of Ps 78:23-25 and Its Interpretation in Early Jewish Sources. 2017.

Vol. 15 Jan Čížek: The Conception of Man in the Works of John Amos Comenius. 2016.

Vol. 16 Bartosz Adamczewski: The Gospel of Matthew. A Hypertextual Commentary. 2017.

Vol. 17 Bartosz Adamczewski: The Gospel of John. A Hypertextual Commentary. 2018.

Vol. 18 Tomasz Stępień & Karolina Kochańczyk-Bonińska: Unknown God, Known in His Activities. 2018

www.peterlang.com